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WHO IS BEING LEFT BEHIND?

State of the Family report
October 2015
Who is being left behind is Anglicare Australia’s 15th State of the Family report, first published October 2015.

It features work from Anglicare network members across the country and draws from Living standard trends in Australia, research commissioned from the University of Canberra’s National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) and A profile of deep and persistent disadvantage, a research report prepared by the Social Policy and Research Unit in Anglicare Sydney.

This and previous reports are available on the Anglicare Australia website www.anglicare.asn.au

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Anglicare Australia is a national network of locally grown, governed and managed, faith-based social service agencies. We are in it for the long term: committed to advocacy based on experience and to working in partnership with local communities and individuals, parishes and other agencies.

The 40 Anglicare Australia member agencies have a combined annual expenditure of over a billion dollars. They provide assistance to families, young people, the aged, the unemployed, and to vulnerable and homeless Australians and work with Indigenous Australians to overcome disadvantage.

Anglicare Australia: local presence; national togetherness

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FOREWORD

This is Anglicare Australia’s 15th State of the Family report.

Over the decade and a half that these reports have been produced, Anglicare Australia has used them to highlight how things are going for the people our network members see and support: the most disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable among us.

The Anglicare network has a belief, founded on our Christian heritage, that every person is of intrinsic value. This connects to the notion of a society that protects the rights of all, treats people with dignity and respect and encourages the participation of everyone.

We take a long-term and global view of our social goals, but of course have a particular interest in the lives and wellbeing of the Australians with whom we work. As a result, there are some key issues that we’ve confronted during the past 15 years.

First is the undeniable reality that people relying on the lowest levels of income support in our nation simply don’t have enough to live on, with consequences for their health and their chances in life.

Our next ongoing concern is the critical shortage of affordable housing for families on low incomes. It is a national market and policy failure affecting people right across the country of all ages and circumstances.

We regularly consider Australia’s ongoing and wide-ranging failure to care for those who most need it. We have looked at young people without safe family homes, people living with disability, family carers, asylum seekers, people battling illness and substance addictions, and the multiple and persisting disadvantages faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Over the years our State of the Family reports have investigated:

- the importance of an inclusionary approach
- the need to work with and alongside communities to support change
- the values and principles that underpin our work
- the complexity of ‘wicked’ problems and
- how wrap-around services can make a difference in the complicated lives of people trapped outside the more affluent mainstream.
No one would claim that these challenges have changed enormously over the
past five or ten years, but political and economic circumstances do suggest we
have reached a kind of watershed.

Australia’s manufacturing industry appears to be a thing of the past, our
focus on mining and other resource extraction offers a limited future at best,
and demographic and environmental change propose an economy based
on services as our most positive future. Some see the cost of social and
environmental protection as merely impeding economic activity and growth.
Others argue that growing inequality needs to be addressed if we are to
become a more just and inclusive society.

This year’s State of the Family report—Who is being left behind—examines
how inequity is affecting Australians, especially those we work with across our
network, and what it would take to create a fairer future.

Rt Rev. Dr Chris Jones
Chairperson
Anglicare Australia
## CONTENTS

**FOREWORD** iii  
**INTRODUCTION** vii  

1. **WHO IS BEING LEFT BEHIND?** 1  
Roland Manderson

2. **LEAVING YOUNG WOMEN BEHIND** 7  
Wendy Malycha

3. **THE RISK OF DEEP AND PERSISTENT DISADVANTAGE** 17  
Sue King, Byron Kemp and John Bellamy

4. **A SPECIAL KIND OF GRACE** 27  
Jeff Johnson-Abdelmalik

5. **MAKING SCHOOL WORK** 33  
Todd Yourell and June Wilke

6. **TRANSITION PATHWAYS** 41  
David Law

7. **RENT RACE INTENSIFIES FOR PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM** 49  
Trish Buhagiar

8. **A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING: HOMELESSNESS** 55  
Stephanie Carson

9. **MANY ROADS TO RECOVERY** 63  
Mark Glasson

10. **EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS** 69  
Bronwen Hayes

**AFTERWORD: STICKING TOGETHER** 76
INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this year’s State of the Family report, Who is being left behind, is a set of stories on some of the people with whom we work with across the Anglicare network. These are people whom Australians overall, through their economic and political decisions, appear comfortable about leaving behind.

They are all stories that cast a light on the work that we do. Sometimes, through the right combination of our care, government support and the right opportunity, we can provide the scaffold that helps people keep connect to the buoyant and affluent society that is evident around us. At other times the services, housing or educational investment just isn’t there, and more or less the same people find themselves excluded from mainstream society, living in continuing hardship and deprivation.

This report was framed by a research paper Anglicare Australia commissioned from the University of Canberra’s National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM). Left Behind: living standard trends (2015) looked at the relative living standards of different household types over the last few years in Australia and where they are heading in the next ten. The findings of that paper confirm the growing inequality and inequity that Anglicare services confront every day.

This year’s report begins with summary of that NATSEM research. Then Wendy Malycha from St John’s Youth Services points out very clearly how the odds are stacked against some of the most vulnerable members of the community, and what ‘falling through the cracks’ really means. We can’t pretend that things will be okay nor that people get what they deserve. Wendy opens the discussion by very simply making it clear that leaving people behind is both immoral and costly.

Sue King offers us the key findings from Anglicare Sydney’s analysis of its Emergency Relief dataset on what constitutes deep and persistent disadvantage and who is most at risk. The young people that Wendy Malycha writes about is one such group. Children, women, single-parent families, people living with disability, and people alone—as our stories illuminate—are the people in our society most likely to be trapped in cycles of poverty and exclusion; and to experience deep and persistent disadvantage.

It is not that nothing can be done:

• Jeffrey Johnson-Abdelmalik explains how personal engagement and a safe place can provide a pathway to profound change for people facing ongoing alienation.
• Todd Yourell and June Wilke identify the specific investment in education we could be making into the young people in our collective care.

• David Law shows us that were you to live on the right side of the border your chances as someone with a disability of qualifying for vital education and employment support can be ten times higher than if you live on the other side.

• Trish Buhagiar shows us how the terrible shortage of affordable housing cripples the life experience of people we condemn to the purgatory of the bridging visa, when a secure home could do the reverse.

• Stephanie Carson spreads that insight to older women without their own home whose lives can so quickly and unfairly fall apart once they retire or lose a partner.

• Mark Glasson shows too that the complicated issues faced, for instance by a young mother escaping domestic violence, can sometimes be resolved through support as mundane as financial counselling, and he asks why we’re cutting back on such essential services.

• Finally, Bronwen Hayes describes the context for the community commitment to child friendly communities and how such a wider approach might provide the support that individuals, families and children need.

In its essence, this year’s State of the Family report is about what being left behind means. It shines a light into our network, and the daily experience of the people we work with, highlighting what is and isn’t happening to address the widening gap we’ve identified.

In some cases, you can see what makes a difference. How the right investment at the right time can give people the best chance of keeping up, of being connected. There are some solutions to these poverty and exclusion traps. We conclude this 2015 State of the Family report with a discussion of the policy implications.

Who is being left behind also shows that it’s pretty hard to make a difference when the larger wheels of government policy, political ideology and economic forces are all stacked up to go the other way.

And that’s the point. Whatever the rationale, the reality is that we can
understand better what our public policies are achieving if we pay attention to the stories of the people they affect. And it is through looking at these stories readers might find themselves asking why is it okay to simply leave so many behind. And if it is not okay, what we should be doing to bring everyone along.

Enjoy the read.

Roland Manderson
Deputy Director
Anglicare Australia
WHO IS BEING LEFT BEHIND?

On election night September 2013, Australia’s then Prime Minister Tony Abbott promised the Australian people ‘We will not leave anyone behind’. But the combination of economic and demographic changes on the one hand and the public policies of Australian governments on the other, are nonetheless conspiring to leave certain groups of people further and further behind.

With that in mind, Anglicare Australia commissioned the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) to look at the relative increases in living standards experienced by different groups of people across Australia over the past ten years, and projections for the change in living standards over the next ten years based on current policies and economic directions.

*Left behind: living standard trends* was released at Anglicare Australia’s national conference in September, 2015.

What it shows us is that households on the lowest incomes have generally had the lowest increases in living standards, and that therefore they are impacted more by increases in costs of living. More significantly, if we project from current settings, Australia is on track to deliver a fall in average living standards for the 40 per cent of households with the lowest incomes. While those with the highest standard of living can probably expect their living standards to rise further.

*Left behind* also looks at the trends for different family types. Couples with children have on average done well. Single parents and people alone, particularly those on moderate to low incomes, have not done well. Most importantly the prognosis for people in these groups is much tougher under current and proposed policies, as slower growth and entrenched unemployment take hold.

Similarly, if we look at it in terms of tenure type, living standards have increased most for those who own their own home, although their actual incomes are not as high as those who are buying a house. On the other hand, living standards increased least for home owners on low incomes, and the
projection for them is for a significant fall in the next ten years. It is two very different stories for home owners.

People in rental housing overall have seen good living standard increases until now, noting that renters of course include employed couples who are yet (or unable) to get into the housing market, as well as people on the lowest incomes in private rental—who our network research shows are likely to be in severe rental stress.

The same thing applies when we look at age. People over 65 have had the best rise in living standards, albeit from a lower base. Those on lower incomes have not done anywhere nearly as well, and can now expect to do significantly worse.

The picture becomes more vivid if we look at the trends for people on income support.

**Equivalised disposable income by benefit type**
**(in 2004 dollars)**

This graph shows the enormous and widening gap between most Australians, i.e. those on generally good incomes, and those who live on benefits. The stories in this year’s *State of the Family* report mostly concern people on Newstart, Youth Allowance and Sole Parent Benefits. Without a doubt they are being left behind.
Households relying on the lowest payment such as Newstart and Youth Allowance have been falling behind all other Australians for the past twenty years (at least), but projections based on government policy and moderate growth show a significant absolute fall in their living standards over the next ten years.

Given how far behind these people are starting, compared to others in the community, it is unconscionable to have policy settings in place that accentuate this difference.

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**Left out of work**

There is a subtext beneath much of the debate around social protection for people of working age: that a low and diminishing income is needed as perverse incentive for people to try harder and succeed in finding work. Anglicare Australia’s own national research on food insecurity *When there’s not enough to eat* (2012) and work commissioned from NATSEM on financial hardship *Going without* (2012) highlight the ill health, housing stress, poor nutrition and growing deprivation that is linked to living on these lowest incomes, with diminishing job prospects.

The length of time that people remain on Newstart Allowance is growing: that 70 per cent remain on it for more than a year (DSS, 2015) highlights this problem. We are continually reminded of discrimination faced by people with disability, those living with mental illness, people who are simply over 50, and young people without work experience when looking for a job. But more to the point, far too often, jobs are just not there. *Beyond supply and demand* (2014), an analysis of evidence from Anglicare services, shows instead that investment in and engagement with individuals is the better path to employment and inclusion.

The NATSEM figures couldn’t burrow down to a level that captures how everyone is faring, for instance people on bridging visas living in our community, care leavers, families living with disability or mental illness, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. But we know full well they are massively over represented among people on income support, on low incomes in private rentals, living alone and in sole parent families.

NATSEM’s analysis of living standard trends provides some further insight into the link—or otherwise—between income support and employment. Over the past eight years, welfare policy has shifted sole parents from the Supporting
Parents’ Allowance (SPA) and onto the much lower Newstart. It was an incremental process at first, with existing parents on SPA ‘grandfathered’ on the more generous provision. But there was a mass reallocation affecting 80,000 single parents in 2013. While this was framed as a fairness measure, the implication was that the harsher work requirements and the lower income associated with Newstart would see more single parents moving into paid work.

Surprisingly however NATSEM analysis shows a substantial increase occurred in sole parent participation in the workforce before these measures took hold. This increase was in both level and share of employment and continued until the Australian economy was hit by the global financial crisis in 2009. Sole parent participation levels have plateaued since then. In other words, the growth in workforce participation reflected the availability of work at the time, and the more punitive approach to income support has simply resulted in cutting the cost to government at the price of a harder life for the parents and children affected, with all the enduring social and economic consequences that come with it.

As Anglicare Australia argued to the Senate inquiry into income inequality in Australia (Anglicare Australia, 2014), lower living standards are linked to poverty and this in turn links to ill health, unemployment, under employment and lack of social connection.

Falling behind is a cumulative experience.

People find themselves out of secure work for extended periods, through ill health, poor education, caring responsibilities, isolation, discrimination and bad luck. It is not a good way to approach the longer years of retirement—seen as such a boon for most of us—if you have no resources or support behind you. You carry the cost of that struggle with you for the rest of your life.

The fairly simple message from NATSEM’s analysis of living standard trends is important. Australia is becoming a more divided and inequitable society. Is this our intention?

In order to ensure the needs and interests of the majority are met, how comfortable are we that the least resilient, affluent or well-connected among us face growing hardship and are falling further behind?
References

Anglicare Australia 2014, Inequality, hardship and social change, An Anglicare Australia submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into the extent of income inequality in Australia, Canberra, viewed 1 August 2015 www.anglicare.asn.au.


About the author

Roland Manderson is Deputy Director of Anglicare Australia. He has particular interests in digital inclusion, ageing and society, development, collaborative projects and co-ordinates Anglicare Australia’s contributions to the many public inquiries and policy debates that are a feature of civil society.
LEAVING YOUNG WOMEN BEHIND

Crisis services are often left to pick up the pieces writes WENDY Malycha, CEO of St John’s Youth Services in South Australia. Yet her confronting article does not let us linger too long on good intentions and warm feelings as she describes what being left behind really means for three young women.

The young people who arrive on the doorstep of St John’s Youth Services—a crisis service for young people and children in the city of Adelaide—have been left behind. For most, the circumstances that led them to our doors can be overcome within a few weeks. Support to access their entitlements and secure housing are among the things we can do to help. They have the optimism of youth, confidence, a capacity to care for themselves and live independently once housing and essential household needs have been met. These young people may remain at the back of the pack as they stabilise, but they will keep up and most go on to live fulfilling lives. Provided with opportunities in learning and work, they thrive and contribute to our community.

Some however, are simply left behind. Left in a place where systems fail, where criteria are black and white, where bureaucratic criteria rule people in—or out—with impersonal efficiency. People with needs in more than one area are particularly at risk. Being at the cusp of adulthood creates an artificial line in itself—the first hurdle for all young people to overcome—are you under or over 18? Should you be in out of home care or referred to a homeless service, should you be under paediatric care or the adult health system?

Then the other variables—mental health or intellectual disability, substance abuse or challenging behaviour, are you under 18 but a parent, are you an Australian citizen, resident or on a visa? Every distinction provides an opportunity for agencies under pressure to assess people as ineligible, and unfortunately it happens all the time. Young people get left behind.
How could Anna be left behind?

Seventeen-year-old Anna was referred to crisis accommodation as unemployed and homeless. Anna did not complete high school, finds it very difficult to interact socially and relies on Centrelink for benefits.

On arrival it became clear that Anna had experienced family breakdown and been abused, forcing her to move out of home and fend for herself. Anna has an intellectual disability that requires assistance to live independently. She has a vision impairment and also needs daily self-care support to help maintain her hygiene and diet due to incontinence and obesity. Anna also requires support with mental health problems resulting from her lifetime of abuse, including an eating disorder, depression and anxiety.

... there were clear signs something was terribly wrong.

Anna’s case is a measure of the inadequacy of systems that should protect children and should have addressed multiple concerns stretching through Anna’s childhood and into adolescence. Anna went to school, but changed schools many times. Although assessed as having a borderline intellectual disability, her near-blindness was not properly evaluated to ensure that schooling catered to her needs.

Why did no one read the signs?

How could a lifetime of abuse not be addressed when there were clear signs something was terribly wrong? The development of bowel incontinence and cuts to her arms must have been noticed. Continual binge eating must have been observed, seeking attention through explicit sexualised behaviour must have been worrying. How could any of these indicators, let alone all of them, leave a child enduring circumstances that culminated in her homelessness at 17?

Anyone who met Anna for the first time could not help but be moved by her circumstances, her vulnerability and sadness. Yet she arrived by herself without support. Anna had a social worker but had seen her rarely as Anna’s parents continued to control access.

To say Anna had ‘fallen through the cracks’ indicates there is a system that has pretty good coverage. It implies that occasionally someone just doesn’t quite meet eligibility and higher need cases take priority. Anna is walking proof that
the system has more than gaps. It has yawning chasms that leave people at risk of falling such a distance that their life is at stake.

Anna was left to fall behind at school through lack of support for both her intellectual and physical impairments. With the care and love of a supportive family, prepared to engage with teachers and work collaboratively to ensure her educational needs were catered for, Anna had the capacity to achieve year 12. But she didn’t and she was left behind.

Anna’s case would have been a challenge for any individual teacher. Her abusive parents were difficult to manage. The lack of proper diagnosis by health professionals regarding her disabilities blocked access to desperately needed assistance in the education system. For a school facing this for one of their students it might even have been a relief when her parents moved her to a new school—a tactic often used by parents who do not want their behaviour challenged.

Anna was left alone to deal with her abusive home environment. Her obvious distress and increasingly challenging behaviour became more dangerous to her safety yet this was somehow put down to the ‘borderline’ intellectual disability. Despite multiple admissions to hospital her care needs out of hospital were not followed up. As Anna grew older she was no longer of an age to be a priority for a safety assessment. Even if there were an attempt to assess the home environment her parents were evasive and moved address regularly. Anna was left in the care of parents who continued to abuse her.

**Looking rather than overlooking**

And so it came about that a youth crisis service was left to pick up the pieces, confront authorities, and ensure that Anna was getting the support she needed. The task was huge. Anna’s difficulties were complex after a childhood and adolescence of neglect and inattention from people in positions who should have cared for her and should have known what was happening to her.

Through St John’s, Anna was in an environment where she was finally safe from her parents, and where her capacity to live independently could be assessed. It took some months of advocacy but a case conference was eventually arranged between the service’s visiting locum (who had responded to Anna’s health needs) and the relevant government departments (Centrelink, Health, Disability, Education, Families, and Housing). When presented with Anna’s now desperate circumstances the outcome was agreement that Anna would be:

- immediately hospitalised to address her now life-threatening obesity, multiple injuries and infections
- immediately re-assessed and her disabilities properly diagnosed to ensure eligibility for ongoing care and supported housing
allocated an ongoing mental health worker and her case given priority
• treated—now that she was aged 18—without consulting the parents who
had historically removed her from hospital. Anna’s social worker would
support her to deal with the health system and ensure follow up care was
maintained
• allocated ongoing care workers to provide personal support, and
• given priority for supportive housing in the community among other
young people with disabilities.

Anna is not alone and yet the ‘borderline’ diagnosis had acted as a trigger for
exclusion. It took a concerted effort to collaborate across agencies so that Anna
could receive the kind of support she should have had all along. It will take a
long period of intensive support in a caring environment for Anna to begin to
trust, to heal, and hopefully to grow her hidden potential. However the critical
break from her abusive parents has provided hope that her life can be restored.
Sometimes even when the situation is understood and help is near at hand, it is
not quite near or fast enough, as Kristy’s story all too painfully shows.

**Leaving Kristy and Sam behind**

Kristy is the young mother of Sam, a physically strong little boy with very
challenging behaviour. Kristy did not plan to be a young parent but when it
happened she made the decision to keep her baby—and to be the best mum
she could be. Her commitment to her little boy is demonstrated through her
quitting heroin the minute she knew she was pregnant, and remaining clean
despite her boyfriend kicking her out and her family turning their backs.

Kristy was doing really well with her son as a mother; very patient and
attentive. She enjoyed being a mother of a small baby and it helped distract
her from the psychological challenge of keeping away from drugs. As Sam
grew it became apparent something was wrong, his development was not all it
should be and his behaviour was extremely hard to manage. Kristy was evicted
when Sam caused damage to her flat. Homeless with a child, Kristy arrived at
our crisis service; stressed, alone, and barely able to cope.

There is not much support available to single parents but her GP recognised
the symptoms and made a referral to Autism SA where he was assessed on the
lower end of the autism spectrum. As a result Sam was not eligible to receive
much support such as respite care, or support for Kristy to have some free time
to herself to spend on work, studies, or self-care.

The crisis service workers observed Sam over several days and recognised that
the little boy had very high needs. His behaviour was similar to an extreme
case of autism and, despite Kristy’s patience and persistence, it was difficult to manage Sam and take care of him the whole day without a break. The boy was also reaching the age limit for the small amount of funding support Kristy was receiving. This was certain to put extra pressure on her and almost make it impossible to move on and bring about any change in her life.

**Slow responses become a slow slide**

Her workers made a referral to Autism SA for re-assessment. Kristy was under immense stress, the wait time for re-assessment was a long way away, and she was struggling to cope. Her family continued to disown her and her workers were concerned that Kristy would return to using heroin due to the constant stress and pressure that she was under.

There was a long wait for Sam’s appointment—too long. Kristy was in crisis. She needed to sort out housing. She was crying out for help with Sam and it was not available. Kristy could not access child care without funding for special care and she could not cope alone any longer.

Kristy and Sam left the service to live with old friends who promised to help care for Sam. Sadly the probability of this decision being a positive solution for Kristy—or Sam—is low. The ‘old friends’ were from her days of using heroin and they continue to be users. Kristy’s stress makes her vulnerable to the call of drugs and Sam’s uncontrollable behaviour will place him at risk sharing a home with people who do not understand his needs, hold no responsibility for him and use substances that inhibit their capacity to respond with care.

Kristy and Sam have been left behind.

But perhaps the most intractable barrier to support is faced by young people, particularly young women, who are residents in Australia but are not Australian citizens.

**Leaving Kurda behind**

Kurda has been in crisis accommodation for almost twelve months. Without money she can’t source housing, buy food or pay for schooling. No other service will accommodate her because she has no income and, not being an Australian citizen, is ineligible for income support. Kurda’s mother is able to work but does not make enough to provide for her daughter.

Kurda and her family are refugees who were settled in another Commonwealth country where they had all been granted citizenship. Extended family violence forced her mother and sibling to escape, and after many years of hiding and the constant pursuit by Kurda’s father and uncles, they moved to Australia in 2010.
Above: Ryan Bullivant, Practice Manager at St John’s Youth Services welcomes a young woman to youth110.

Left: Outside Ladder, the St John’s Youth Service Foyer program that links young people into housing and education.

Below: Young people who find it difficult to interact socially can quickly become isolated and withdrawn.
Initially Kurda felt safe but as her brother grew up he followed the example of men in his life and became increasingly violent toward Kurda and her mother. Eventually Kurda was assaulted and critically injured by her brother. An intervention order was put in place but despite police involvement her brother was not deported and continues to reside in the family home. So Kurda had to leave.

In the ensuing twelve months Kurda has worked hard to stay at school and constantly applies for work to provide her with an income. She has successfully undertaken several work experience stints to build her resume while trying to achieve year 12, but none led to paid work. Kurda is completely reliant on our crisis service for her food, transport, to fund her laundry, a prepaid phone, GP care and provide a small allowance. Our service also liaises with her school and supported an appeal to Centrelink for income support although this has been hampered by her brother’s refusal to provide documentation necessary to prove her identity.

The strain is taking its toll. Sadly Kurda is losing hope and over the past few months we have been concerned by a pattern—going out every night, sleeping during the day, the sudden appearance of new clothes, jewellery and makeup—all of it out of character. Kurda lost her capacity to remain positive. She has become reclusive and hard to engage. Workers recorded evidence of injuries on three occasions. The most recent of these required medical intervention. Kurda has turned to prostitution to pay education costs, but her lifestyle means she is missing school through sleeping in. Her grades have suffered along with her attendance.

We are now ticking off the days to mark five years since Kurda has been in Australia. After this she may become eligible for a one-off six-month payment from Centrelink. Even with this glimmer of hope Kurda’s position is dire. At a time when Australia is focusing on family and domestic violence and the safety of women, those who are migrants or refugees are particularly vulnerable. Arranged marriages, lived trauma and dislocation contribute to the vulnerability of too many young women who are reliant on their family for housing, papers and income.

Kurda has simply been left behind as well.
Being left behind can sound benign; an oversight, a momentary lapse. Yet for these three young women the consequences of being left behind are extreme. Our collective inaction, our determined, continued looking away, our ‘too little too late’ responses are damaging young lives in ways that reach far into their future.

**About the author**

Wendy Malycha is CEO of St John’s Youth Services, having worked in community services for the past 25 years in health, housing and crisis services. She has established and managed rural and city based services for disadvantaged people and served on the boards of several state and national peak bodies. A founding member of Homelessness SA, Wendy is also life member of SACOSS and holds academic qualifications in social work and housing management and policy.
THE RISK OF DEEP AND PERSISTENT DISADVANTAGE

SUE KING, BYRON KEMP and JOHN BELLAMY from the Anglicare Diocese of Sydney, Social Policy and Research Unit have looked at what we know about deep and persistent disadvantage and interrogated their extensive Emergency Relief dataset, to give a broader context for who is being left behind. Their full report—A profile of deep and persistent disadvantage—can be found at www.anglicare.org.au/research.

The evidence base

Many people suffer disadvantage but manage to improve their life circumstances over time. For others, an unexpected crisis—a relationship breakdown, retrenchment or onset of illness—can pitch their household into crisis. Disadvantage can be intermittent, episodic and short term—driven by these unexpected events. For such people short-term access to support and services is sufficient to tide them over a temporary difficulty. However for some people disadvantage is not short term but complex and embedded. Both groups are found among the clients of Anglicare Emergency Relief services around Australia but it is the latter group, those who experience deep, persistent disadvantage over many years—for some, over their lifetime—that Anglicare Sydney has been working with over time.

In July 2007 Anglicare Sydney established a coordinated data collection across its network of six Emergency Relief (ER) centres in Sydney and the Illawarra, expanded across to more sites in the following years. The ER services provide food cards, food hampers, assistance with the payment of energy bills, no-interest loans and advocacy for individuals experiencing significant financial
hardship. In the period July 2007 and December 2014 some 39,662 people made 122,596 visits to an Anglicare ER centre. Total financial assistance provided in this period was $17.2m.

The Social Policy and Research Unit at Anglicare Sydney have undertaken periodic analysis of this data (King et al, 2009; 2010; 2012; 2014). This analysis reveals significant levels of deprivation for households accessing the ER services. A study by Homel and Ryan in 2012 examined both Anglicare Sydney’s ER data from July 2007 to December 2009 as well as that of the Salvation Army and the St Vincent de Paul Society. Risk indicators of poverty and exclusion were established across all these smaller dataset studies and these have been confirmed in the findings of the 2007–2015 Anglicare Sydney ER time series. For the purposes of this report the data series has been interrogated to identify those groups of the population who are most likely to present at an ER centre and therefore at risk of deep and persistent disadvantage.

Deep and persistent disadvantage

For our purposes here the term ‘disadvantage’ means a lack of appropriate access to resources in order to maintain an adequate standard of living. This can be characterised by income poverty, reduced participation in society (both economic and social) and blocked opportunities so that the ability for people to break out of the cycle of disadvantage is compromised and/or diminished.

While many people suffer episodic hardship or a disadvantaged start in life, for a smaller proportion of people disadvantage is experienced as longer term and entrenched. It occurs when deprivations are prolonged, multiple and often inter-generational. Levitas et al (2007) defined it as ‘deep exclusion’:

Deep exclusion refers to exclusion across more than one domain or dimension of disadvantage, resulting in severe negative consequences for quality of life, well being and future life chances (Levitas, et al, 2007, p. 9).

Deep disadvantage thus refers to those who are deprived on multiple counts. It can include low income, unemployment, food insecurity, ill health and disability, reduced access to services, homelessness, housing insecurity and social discrimination. Deep disadvantage is the end result of a long-term process. It is often multi-dimensional, multi-causal, compounding and geographically concentrated. Multiple deficits across a number of domains will lead to persistent and deep disadvantage, which can become intergenerational. Other studies refer to this as an accumulation of risk factors (Braver & Jenvey, 2012, p. 10).
Material deprivation and hardship are entrenched issues for a significant proportion of the Australian population. A 2014 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report (2014, p. 1) found relative poverty in Australia at 14.4 per cent of the population is higher than the OECD average of 11.3 per cent. While annual disposable income is higher than the OECD average so too is income inequality, making the issue of disadvantage both current and unresolved in the Australian context (see Text Box: Disadvantage in Australia).

**Who is most at risk**

People who need to resort to the services of ER on an episodic basis (i.e. several times a year) over a number of years may be said to fall into the category of deep and persistent disadvantage. Of people who accessed ER services between 2007 and 2014, 53 per cent had visited on multiple occasions and 18 per cent had done so five or more times during the period.

Over almost eight years of ER data collection on more than 39,000 clients found clear evidence of:

- **Income poverty**—62 per cent of households presented with incomes of less than $1000 per fortnight.
- **Unemployment**—less than 5 per cent of households had someone in either full time or part time employment.
- **Housing insecurity and rental stress**—16 per cent of households were housing insecure indicating they were experiencing some form of homelessness and while more than half (54 per cent) of those in rental accommodation experienced rental stress, 31 per cent were approaching severe rental stress.

A number of people groups are particularly at risk of deep and persistent disadvantage as represented in the Anglicare Sydney ER database:

- **Lone person households**—single people were the largest group of service users (43 per cent of households), with 94 per cent on incomes of less than $1,000 per fortnight. For the two-year period 2013-14, 68 per cent of ER clients from lone person households fell within or below the December 2013 poverty line. Almost one in three (30 per cent) were approaching severe housing stress by spending more than 45 per cent of their low income on accommodation costs.
• **Single parents**—29 per cent of all ER service users were single parents, compared with 9 per cent in the Greater Sydney population (2011 Census data, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2013). Almost half (42 per cent) of single parent families in the ER database were receiving incomes of less than $1,000 per fortnight and 71 per cent on the Parenting Payment and 81 per cent on *Newstart Allowance* fell below the poverty line. Almost all single parent households with four or more children were in poverty, regardless of whether they were receiving *Parenting Payment* (91 per cent) or *Newstart* (99 per cent).

• **Households with children**—there were an estimated 36,000 children in ER households across Sydney and the Illawarra. More than one third of households with children (37 per cent) were on incomes of less than $1,000 per fortnight and more than half (59 per cent) resided in households experiencing rental stress.

• **Female headed households**—60 per cent of female-headed households (single parent and single person households headed by female) were receiving incomes of less than $1,000 per fortnight, 12 per cent were experiencing some form of homelessness and 55 per cent were experiencing rental stress. For the subset of single women over 50 years of age, nine out of ten (93 per cent) were receiving incomes of less than $1,000 per fortnight and almost half (49 per cent) were receiving the Disability Support Pension (DSP).

• **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders**—12 per cent of ER service users identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, which is a significant overrepresentation compared with the wider population of Greater Sydney (1.2 per cent). Three quarters (78 per cent) of households represented by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person were on incomes of less than $1,000 per fortnight and 18 per cent of such households indicated they had experienced some form of homelessness.

• **People with a disability**—one in four households accessing ER services received DSP (23 per cent). Of these households, three out of four (75 per cent) were receiving incomes of less than $1,000 per fortnight, 15 per cent experienced some form of homelessness and 41 per cent were experiencing rental stress.
Housing stress: compounding disadvantage

Increasingly housing stress, particularly in the rental market is being observed as a risk indicator of disadvantage (Padley & Hirsch 2013, p. 21). This has been confirmed by a 2012 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) study, which concluded that housing stress is not necessarily an indicator of financial disadvantage but is an indicator of the potential risks of falling into hardship (Rowley & Ong, 2012, p. 48). Housing security on the other hand can be seen as a protective factor against other experiences of disadvantage. While not everyone in the groups described above has insecure housing, where it is a factor in their lives, housing insecurity concentrates the disadvantage they are already experiencing.

In the Anglicare dataset more than three quarters (76 per cent) of ER service users were renting and were almost equally split between the private rental market (37 per cent) and public housing (38 per cent). By comparison, 2011 Greater Sydney Census statistics revealed that only 25 per cent of households were renting privately and only 5 per cent were in public housing.

It is no coincidence that more than half of the stories in this year’s State of the Family report feature housing. Everybody needs it but has become a private resource, one that society does not provide or guarantee. As a risk factor it can hang over an individual or household in many forms: from unstable rental accommodation—with associated disruptions to lives, learning and income—through to unsafe housing and full homelessness (think of the young people and women in these pages, living ‘in their own home’ yet not safe from violence and abuse or having to move between friends’ spare rooms, living in cars or on the streets).

Housing security is the sleeper issue: where instability in living arrangements at one age (rising rental costs, multiple foster care homes or turbulent family life) can quietly but relentlessly become homelessness at another age. This can be arbitrary, for instance when work-life and money dry up, when turning 18 means reaching independence or when long-term conflict erupts in violence or family breakdown.

Who cares?

Even within this dataset and its identification of groups most at risk there are smaller groups caught up in deep and persistent disadvantage that do not yet appear on the statistical scale. Despite this, their stories appear in these pages because we are aware through our experience of their heightened vulnerability and compounding disadvantage. A disadvantage in which housing security
plays no small part. These groups include young people leaving care and people granted refugee status or seeking asylum who are trying to establish or rebuild their lives.

For each person who comes to ER with an accretion of deep and persistent disadvantage, it is a personal not a statistical story. Their needs, their stories illuminate how easy it is to disappear from view and be left behind even with best efforts to count and to understand.

There is no doubt that an effective public response to this entrenched inequity is possible. In our Profile of deep and persistent disadvantage, we call for a national poverty plan and federal government action on income support, housing and taxation. But for action on that scale to gain the support of most of us in Australia we need to pay attention to both who is being excluded and how.

### Disadvantage in Australia

A number of different but related concepts fall under the umbrella term ‘disadvantage’. The seminal work of Saunders et al (2007, p. 11) articulates three: poverty, deprivation and social exclusion.

- **Income poverty**—experienced where people’s median income falls below a threshold of between 50 and 60 per cent. A 2013 Productivity Commission (PC) report (McLachlan et al, 2013, p. 8) based on 2010 estimates, found that 10-13 per cent of the Australian population live in poverty (i.e. income is 50 per cent below median income). This equates to between 2.3 and 2.8 million people.

- **Deprivation**—where people lack resources to maintain an adequate standard of living. It involves going without what the community generally considers to be essential for quality-of-life. Studies estimate that 17 per cent or 2.9 million Australians experience multiple forms of deprivation (McLachlan et al, 2013, p. 8).

- **Social Exclusion**—a term used to describe multiple hardships including unemployment, low levels of literacy and skills, poor health, and poverty, and the way these factors interact to exclude people from participating in mainstream society. The PC report estimated, about 25 per cent of Australians over the age of 15 (4.5 million people), experience some form of social exclusion.
References


About the authors

Sue King is the Director of Advocacy and Partnerships at Anglicare Sydney with a research background in the history of economic thought, financial institutions and international trade at the University of Sydney. Sue’s exploration of social policy issues includes deep social exclusion in emergency relief centres, food and housing insecurity, and homelessness and disability. She is also interested in the development of organisation-wide evaluation frameworks that focus on outcomes for clients and impact on communities.

Byron Kemp is a research officer with Anglicare Sydney’s Social Policy & Research Unit. Byron has five years’ experience working as a social researcher and demographer, specialising in quantitative analysis and mapping.

John Bellamy is a senior researcher with Anglicare Sydney’s Social Policy & Research Unit, and is an Honorary Fellow of Australian Catholic University. He holds a doctorate and his areas of social policy research include social disadvantage, food insecurity and disability.
Above: Drop-in centre, The Warehouse, serving up ‘Christmas in July’, Anglicare Sydney Mt Druitt

Middle left: Anglicare Sydney supporting carers during Carers Week

Middle right: Anglicare Sydney’s Reconnect aims to make a real difference in the lives of young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Left: Supporting new migrants and refugees to settle in Australia
A SPECIAL KIND OF GRACE

One woman’s dignity and determination opened the eyes of others and the possibilities at A Place to Belong. Drawing on a joint research project between Anglicare Southern Queensland and the School of Public Health and Social Work at the University of Queensland, JEFF JOHNSON-ABDELMALIK describes the two-way learning when Grace walked in the door; curious to learn, determined to connect and live life to the full.

Grace has lived in her inner-city suburb of Brisbane for many years and she knows a lot of local people, places and community groups. She is deeply courteous and respectful towards others. At times, however, communication can be a barrier for Grace due to her mental health experiences.

In daily life Grace deals with formal thought disorder, which means that her thinking and speech can be tangential or fragmented and difficult to follow. Formal thought disorder and the side effects of various medications also affect Grace’s memory and her ability to focus on tasks. Her way of thinking and her experiences can be very different from other people’s. For example, she describes hearing voices and seeing things that other people do not hear or see. This can be disruptive and difficult for her and unsettling for people who don’t realise or understand what is happening. She also has some unusual beliefs that are very real to her, but which others do not always understand or appreciate are real to Grace.

People with mental health problems and other disabilities and disadvantages, such as homelessness and illiteracy, fall between the cracks of society. Their internal and external worlds are difficult and sometimes dangerous places to navigate. They are often disconnected from formal education including the Vocational Education and Training system, with few opportunities for education and employment. Even if they can afford this education, the curriculum may be
too hard for people to negotiate; not because it is too difficult, but because life has all sorts of challenges and obstacles that get in the way.

**A RAW exchange of learning**

Three years ago Grace connected with the Reading and Writing group (RAW) of the Anglicare community agency A Place to Belong in Brisbane. Grace indicated that she wanted to learn how to use a computer and this proved to be the first step in making coherent communication between herself and people who were in a position to help.

RAW’s involvement with Grace has provided much insight into how to communicate with someone experiencing formal thought disorder. With her guidance, RAW workers have learned that typing or writing things down using single words, simple phrases or brief questions can be a useful way of communicating and keeping focus. A mutually respectful relationship has developed as workers and volunteers have got to know Grace better, seeing her gifts and skills such as her creativity, her courtesy and her ability to advocate for herself and others.

Through her involvement with the Reading and Writing Group, Grace linked up with A Place to Belong’s inclusion team. Grace wanted to deepen and sustain her community connections. After a year of mutual work Grace was able to put together a successful funding application to allow her to move towards independent living; out of the hostel accommodation that she loathes and where she has been stuck for many decades. A circle of support has developed around her; a network of non-paid friends. They plan to use that network to help Grace achieve her goal.

The connection between literacy and the achievement of one’s goals in life is intimate. People who have always been in control of their reading and writing and taken literacy for granted may not notice that even reading bus signs (frequently electronic and moving) is an advanced literacy skill, let alone buying food or signing a rental agreement.

**More than reading and writing**

Some years ago, A Place to Belong recognised the connection between recovery from mental health issues, connection to community, and literacy and numeracy. They developed a program of ‘socially-inclusive learning’ (Marston & Johnson-Abdelmalik, 2014, 2015). What people learn in RAW is directly relevant to what they value in life; if they are isolated and disconnected from
community, the agency will link that literacy learning to what they want to achieve, and help them take control of a program of learning they design themselves.

People come to RAW sometimes with a presenting need ‘to learn to read and write’, but in a matter of weeks they reveal needs that are far more essential. As people gain in skills and confidence, including their growth of ability with literacy, they may also become more confident to express desires for things that they may have been denied for years, and decades.

Other participants of RAW learn to read articles about bodybuilding because they are interested in going to the gym; some learn basic computer programming because they have an interest in technology; others act out role-plays or sing because they enjoy performing. Students have gone on to paid employment, independent living and mainstream education. Others have become more mobile in their communities through their ability to read bus and train timetables. Some had proudly written their first book, first poem or performed music in a public setting. Some ex-students had even returned as volunteers or part-time employees in the program, modelling their newly acquired skills and confidence for the benefit of others.

... reading bus signs (frequently electronic and moving) is an advanced literacy skill ... 

Mutual respect before mutual obligation

Social inclusion is about so much more than getting a job and getting off welfare. What emerges from these students is a wide and subtle reading of what social inclusion is about. It is about motivation, gaining power over one’s life, and gaining power and control over one’s mental health. It is also about acquiring the voice both written and spoken that helps you win these things. And most of all it is about the intentional cultivation of mutual respect. Instead of the heavy emphasis in our society on mutual obligation—which frames the person needing support as already lacking skills and attitude, and assumes that they are out to play the system—mutual respect empowers both supporters and the person supported to do great things. This is clear in Grace’s story.
Above: Drama connects to reading: role plays help understand the roles of police

Left: Singing as social literacy—a band is formed

Below: Trevor and John use drawings to master social roles.
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About the author

Jeffrey Johnson-Abdelmalik is a postdoctoral researcher in the areas of social policy, disability and mental health with thirty years’ experience in government and the community sector. He maintains one foot in academic work and one foot in the world of practice, believing that the interaction of theory and practice leads to interesting insights. The theorisation of the implicit RAW model of ‘inclusive learning’ is an example of that fusion.
MAKING SCHOOL WORK

Education is the key to equalising the disadvantage that occurs for children and young people who are in out-of-home care. Co-authors TODD YOURELL and JUNE WILKE from Children and Adolescent Specialist Programs and Accommodation (CASPA), find current systems and structures in Australian education are not adequately addressing the issues.

Jake came into CASPA’s care when he was fourteen years of age. He was illiterate, couldn’t write his own name. He was violent and his family had relinquished him. Jake would not engage in any form of education until this year.

At CASPA we try to suit the individual needs and interests to fit the Young Peoples Education Plan. For instance Jake has indicated that he fundamentally wants assistance to learn to read and write. The Education Officer has developed a positive relationship with Jake and we have tailored his distance education to meet this need through liaising with the Southern Cross Distance Education team. Jake completes exercises weekly that promote phonetics and reading skills along with two to three education booklets that are a compulsory part of his distance education requirements. He can now write his ABC, he is reading books, he has hobbies, he is determined to make changes in his life to live independently. Jake wants to rely on himself not others, he wants to be at CASPA even if it means challenging him to his core.

‘The poor educational performance of children in out-of-home care has been a recognised concern, internationally, for a number of decades. In Australia, less attention has been given to this issue even though the limited research to date indicates that children in care are performing worse than their non-care peers and face a range of barriers in engaging with their school life’ (Townsend, 2011).
Children and young people in out-of-home care are regularly suspended and expelled from mainstream schooling, due to their socially unacceptable behaviours. Whilst this solves a problem for the school, it does not help the child. The child, in most cases, exhibits behaviours as a direct result of their early childhood trauma, attachment disorders or due to complications occurring in their living environment. As is commonly derived from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, people will concentrate on their basic needs for survival as the first stage of their motivations (Maslow, 1943).

**Set up to fail**

For many of these children current structures in education are set up for them to further experience failure, miss out on the benefits of socialisation that can occur in a school environment, develop a mistrust in schools and fall further behind in education. They develop an intrinsic belief that they can get by without education.

‘Disaffected young people feel estranged from the social norms, particularly regarding education, and may lack motivation and have behavioural problems. Two phenomena are of concern:

- path to failure in which the disadvantages that an individual faces are usually apparent in early life and persist long into adulthood and old age
- cycles of disadvantage when deprivation in one generation is likely to pass down to the next.

Educational attainment has been identified as a key factor in either escaping from the cycles of exclusion or contributing to them’ (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency, (Becta), 2008).

The NSW Department of Education provides a range of services in government schools to support the health, welfare and wellbeing of all students, including those in out-of-home care (OOHC).

In addition to the staff in their school, students may be supported through a network of school counsellors, student welfare consultants, teachers specially trained in behaviour management or disability support, year advisors and home school liaison officers. In some schools there are also Aboriginal education officers and community liaison officers.

Some students may experience difficulties in successfully engaging with education because of their care circumstances particularly as they transition into and between care settings and schools. The school may organise for
additional support to be provided during these transition periods. This supplementary support is in the form of teacher and/or school learning support officer relief.

Even with this support we still find that our young people disengage from education. As part of CASPA’s commitment to successful educational outcomes for our young, CASPA has two staff responsible for the organisation and implementation of education for our young people, an education coordinator and an education officer who enrol young people, liaise with departmental and school staff and ensure smooth transition (see box for details).

### What young people need: structure and commitment

CASPA’s commitment to successful education for young people includes an education coordinator and an education officer to provide extra support through:

- enrolment of new young people at local schools or distance education
- attending meetings to develop Personal Learning Plans, Risk assessments and Behaviour Management Plans
- liaising with regional Department of Education and Communities in relation to funding support
- liaising with OOHC coordinators in relation to transition funding for young people enrolling in school
- liaising with Southern Cross Distance Education staff in relation to the needs of our young people
- liaising with school principals and staff regarding the progress of our young people
- attending return from suspension meetings and review meetings
- attending case reviews and team meetings
- meeting on a weekly basis with young people enrolled in distance education to assist them with their school work.

All children and young people in our care are enrolled in either mainstream school or distance education. At CASPA we are committed to supporting our young people gain a Higher School Certificate or its equivalent.
Children’s involvement in planning and decision-making was considered key to promoting positive outcomes and supporting their adjustment to new circumstances. The findings further suggest that a focus by professionals on meeting individual children’s short- and long-term needs, including relationship requirements, will enhance their educational outcomes (Townsend, 2011).

Australian education systems, although trying to address this matter, are not effectively meeting the needs. More resources need to be put to this problem or Australia risks further perpetuating this issue through generations, leaving not only this cohort of young people behind but also the next generation.

We suggest a number of recommendations for education in relation to OOHC young people. First, pre-service training for teachers should include training about the behaviours of our young people, including reactive attachment disorder, oppositional defiance disorder and how trauma, abuse and neglect influence the development of the brain. This training should also be made available to all practicing teachers in education settings in NSW. Bruce Perry’s Six Core Strengths should also be a requirement as part of the training for pre-service and practicing teachers (Perry, 2002).

As many of our young people fail in mainstream schools and are failed by mainstream schools there needs to be alternate learning models introduced to cater for the needs of these young people so that they experience success in their learning.

Alternate school settings as satellites of existing schools that cater for the individual needs of OOHC young people, with teachers who are trained around the complex needs of the young people, using an alternate curriculum and pathways would be another way of addressing the poor learning outcomes that OOHC young people experience at the present time.

For Jake the experience of success came through a tailored program and positive relationships that opened a pathway to literacy outside of the usual channels. It spurred him on to other positive experiences and the chance to live a more enriched, independent life.
Left and above: Lantern Parade, Lismore 2015.
CASPA Lanterns: pelican, seagulls and pirate.
CASPA staff, families and young people from residential and foster care carry the lanterns.

Below: Inscribe Mural, designed and painted by a group of young people including a 14-yr-old girl from CASPA
References


About the authors

June Wilke works at CASPA as the Education Coordinator and Case Work Team Leader. She was a secondary teacher for more than 20 years, a Senior Education Consultant for the Department of Education for almost ten years and a Partnership Broker for four years. June brings a wealth of experience to the position of Education Coordinator at CASPA and is committed to the success of the young people that she works with.

Todd Yourell is the Chief Executive Officer of the North Coast Children’s Home Inc. known as CASPA. Todd has been at CASPA for five years and brings to the role knowledge of business as well as behaviour and physiology. He is a council member of Anglicare Australia and serves on a number of other committees and boards around the North Coast of New South Wales.
TRANSITION PATHWAYS

It’s a big task for any young person to make the transition to work from school. For young people with disabilities it can be an ‘EPIC assist’ as DAVID LAW shows. A nimble, nuanced service and surprising pathways seem to provide outcomes when policy is the problem not the solution.

Young people with disability are more likely to drop out of school early, have fewer educational qualifications and often miss out on opportunities that young people without disability participate in as a matter of course. Caleb is a young boy who is defying the odds with support and a collaborative approach between providers. Yet others are unable to access help due to inconsistencies, different state supports and ineligibility arising from the origin of their disability. These young people are already facing more than the average number of hurdles compared to their peers.

Usually young people in their high school years participate in work experience, a school-based traineeship or a part-time job. Young people with disability do not get the same exposure to these experiences. As a result they find it difficult to take an employment pathway in their final years and then post-school. The current labour market compounds the issues that young people with disability face in the transition from high school into their adult lives.

The accepted unemployment figure sits somewhere at around 5 to 6 per cent. (Australia’s estimated seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for June 2015 was 6 per cent according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, June 2015)).

If a person has a disability or is young or lives in a regional area the unemployment rates are alarming and have been for many years. The national youth unemployment rate is more than double the rate for the general population. For the youngest in this group—those aged 15 to 19 years—the rates are higher still. For certain locations, places such as Far West Orana
NSW, Southern Tasmania, Cairns and Wide Bay — youth unemployment is well over 20 per cent (Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), 2015. See box for details).

For a person with disability the most recent and reliable figures show the unemployment rate is almost double the national rate. What is more startling is that the gap between unemployment among people with a disability and national unemployment is in fact widening.

Workforce: a persistent and widening gap

Workforce participation rates for people with disability have declined at the same time as national participation rates have improved. Figures for unemployment show alarming disparities. Where a person has a disability, is young or lives in a regional area unemployment rates are much higher than the national rate. The gap is sustained and widening.

- In June 2015 Australia’s estimated seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6 per cent.
- In April 2015 national youth unemployment (15–24 year-olds) was 13.56 per cent (more than double the rate for the general population).
- For the younger part of this group (15–19 year-olds) unemployment is higher still (ABS, June 2015).
- For certain locations youth unemployment is well over 20 per cent: Far West Orana NSW (22.44), Southern Tasmania (21.03) Cairns (20.74) and Wide Bay (20.53), (SBS, 2015).
- For a person with disability the unemployment rate is 9.4 per cent, (almost double the national rate of 4.9 per cent).
- Between 1993 and 2012 national work force participation rates:
  - declined for people with disability from 54.9 to 52.8 per cent
  - increased for the general population from 76.9 to 82.5 per cent.
- One fifth of the people with a disability who are not participating in the work force has reported that their disability is not the reason that they are not participating (ABS, 2012).

Sources: ABS, 2012; ABS, 2015; SBS 2015
Workforce participation rates for people with disability have declined at the same time as national participation rates have improved. Down from 54.9 per cent to 52.8 per cent for people with a disability while the national participation rate went from 76.9 per cent to 82.5 per cent in the 19 years from 1993 to 2012. One fifth of the people with a disability who are not participating in the work force have reported that their disability is not the reason that they are not participating in the work force.

**Collaboration and actively working the guidelines**

Today there is little encouragement from the data to suggest that these trends have improved for young people and in particular for those with disability. From this information it is reasonable to surmise that young people with disability approaching the end of year 12, seeking employment are going to have significant challenges. Successive governments have targeted this group with programs and resources but all too often ability to access the programs is hampered by complex eligibility requirements that can vary between the states.

One program, the Disability Employment Service–Employment Support Service (DES-ESS), while not perfect has specific policy and guidelines designed for young people with disability who want to transition from high school to employment. Introduced in 2010, the guidelines for the program change often. With each revision of guidelines, eligibility becomes more complex. As complexity increases the number of DES-ESS service providers assisting young people to navigate the process reduces. This leaves the policy ineffective, with no improvement in outcomes for an already significantly disadvantaged group.

Caleb, a year 12 student at a High School in the Wide Bay region in Queensland, is one young man benefiting from a collaborative approach and the support of EPIC Assist. Caleb has an intellectual disability. At the beginning of 2015 he began DES-ESS with EPIC. Following employability training he secured a School Based Traineeship to complete a Certificate II in Retail with a local employer.

Caleb was willing to commence the Traineeship, which gave him the opportunity to achieve a relevant vocational qualification as well as employment. EPIC provided workplace support and mentoring as well as additional assistance with the study elements related to the School Based Traineeship.

This young man comes from a family of inter-generational unemployment and he is the first to gain sustainable employment in two generations. Positive role modelling, additional support and his own determination to succeed have produced results. He gained additional work hours over the minimum
Above left: William Sarris, EPIC Assist ‘Trainee of the Month’, May 2015, Photo: EPIC Assist

Above right: Gary Bryant and Robert Holstein, Emilio’s Café, Photo: EPIC Assist

Right: EPIC Assist participant, Sharlene, Photo: EPIC Assist

Below: EPIC participant and iNVISAGE Media employee, Jayden, Photo: iNVISAGE Media
traineeship requirements, become a valued member of the employer’s team and his attitude towards school work is improving. Caleb is achieving his goals. He does not have a network of family support or a male role model in his life. This support has come from EPIC and plays a significant role in sustaining his employment and progress with the traineeship.

A view across the border

EPIC Assist is a DES-ESS service provider operating in Queensland and New South Wales. This puts EPIC in a unique position to understand the discrepancies in services and outcomes for young people with disabilities. As a result of the differences in the funding of disability support services in schools by different education departments, the access to DES-ESS between states differs dramatically. During 2014 and 2015 in Queensland more than 300 students transitioned into employment with DES-ESS assistance. Over the same period in New South Wales less than 20 were assisted into employment.

There are big differences in the DES-ESS outcomes in different areas and as a provider in Queensland and New South Wales, EPIC Assist has a clear view of the differences. In the same region as Caleb, another young person, David, has an acquired brain injury resulting from an accident. David’s special education adjustments in school are funded by an insurance compensation. Because this method of funding is not recognised within the policy or guidelines David cannot join the DES-ESS program. He cannot access the same service as his fellow student, Caleb. David is excluded from DES-ESS and would need to leave school early to access any assistance from DES-ESS. It’s a confounding outcome because on the surface many people consider that insurance has always seemed to produce uneven outcomes but in the reverse direction. Those born with a disability are usually given fewer supports via government benefits than those with insurance to cover needs for an acquired injury.

He does not have a network of family support or a male role model in his life. This support has come from EPIC

In another example from the Sunshine Coast region, Lucas, another year 12 student referred for DES-ESS services by the Head of Special Education cannot access the services because his disability has not been verified. Although the high school is providing an adjusted education program due to his disability and he receives support from the Special Education Unit, Lucas does not receive Education Adjustment Program funding therefore he is not
eligible for DES-ESS. This means Lucas cannot access the DES-ESS transition pathway because the disability does not meet the eligibility criteria to satisfy a contractual requirement.

Government has provided a reasonable policy for services and programs to assist this disadvantaged group. However, the guidelines or ‘red tape’, that have been placed around the policy create too many barriers and complexities. They make the policy ineffective for young people. These are young people who already have many barriers to overcome in order to participate in their community.

The Federal Government has established a Disability Employment Taskforce to review the current Disability Employment Service and develop a new National Disability Employment Framework. We urge that this review pays close attention to the issues faced by young people with disability as they transition from high school to adult life. It matters that every young person, regardless of how they acquired their disability or where they live, has equal access and receives the most effective training and employment support for their circumstances.

References


About the author

David Law’s career in the community services sector spans 25 years in Australia and the United Kingdom. He has a Master of Disability Studies and his work in the community sector ranges from direct support work through to senior leadership roles. With a focus on social inclusion, he has worked in youth services, early intervention, adults with intellectual disabilities with complex and challenging behaviour and disability employment. David joined EPIC Assist in 2006 and has focused on sustainable outcomes for participants and developing the person-centred service delivery model.
RENT RACE INTENSIFIES FOR PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

Everyone has a story about red tape or impossibly high rents. TRISH BUHAGIAR, Anglicare South Australia (SA), explores how these familiar difficulties can be impassable hurdles for people already living with little security, lacking ease with the language and without a living wage.

Ali and his family are asylum seekers from Burma who were referred to Anglicare SA for temporary accommodation in January 2015. Anglicare SA Housing provided a four-bedroom property for Ali’s family of seven, which included four young children. Initially Anglicare SA provided 12-week temporary accommodation but was also able to offer long-term accommodation for the family. Ali’s story reflects the journey of thousands of asylum seekers who have been released on bridging visas into communities throughout Australia.

Housing is one of the greatest challenges facing asylum seekers in Australia today. Many who have applied for protection can live for years in the community without stable accommodation and without access to any mainstream housing services. This instability flows into every aspect of their lives affecting children’s schooling, employment and connections with the community. All Australians face difficulties when searching for affordable well-maintained housing close to relatives and friends, perhaps where they grew up or close to good quality schools for their children. Asylum seekers living in the community on bridging visas face these same barriers but with increased challenges associated with securing accommodation. Their legal status is uncertain and their income is very often limited. Asylum seeker families are on a reduced rate of government benefits, which limits their financial capacity. They also face non-financial barriers such as lack of rental history and discrimination by agents and landlords. Compounding these hurdles
Right: A house Anglicare SA makes available to families on bridging visas

Centre: It’s much easier to connect to school and build friendships when you have somewhere secure to live.

Below: A family at a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees camp
are difficulties with language that can make negotiating the private rental application process much harder for asylum seekers.

The challenges faced by asylum seekers in Australia brings forth a ‘wrath of problems’ to be overcome. These are the very people whose own country of origin has in one way or the other ‘left them behind’. Ali and his family fled Burma in search of a secure and safe home. Ali is a Rohingya Muslim, a Muslim ethnic minority group. The majority of Rohingya Muslims are denied citizenship in Burma as they are viewed as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.

Ali needed to rent a large property to house the family of seven. Yet he had little income. Like most asylum seekers living in the community on bridging visas and with uncertain legal status, Ali and his family do not have access to state government public and community housing registers. The family was referred to Anglicare SA for transitional housing through the federal government’s Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS). Under this program, families are housed for up to 12 weeks or until long-term accommodation is secured for them. Anglicare SA provides practical tenancy support to asylum seekers and assistance to navigate and access the housing market. We are the first to demonstrate how to operate basic household goods and provide them with information such as where schools can be found and where to purchase culturally appropriate foods. Where possible, Anglicare SA often provides long-term accommodation in one of its own properties. With long-term placements we try to suit the family composition but there are other factors to consider too. Anglicare SA will try to place them near other asylum seekers from their homeland or—if lucky enough to have family or friends already living in Australia—close to their existing networks.

*In an already competitive rental market asylum seekers face little chance ...*

After finding temporary housing, the next hurdle is long-term accommodation. This often means competing with Australian residents for private rental accommodation whenever there is an affordable property available. Anglicare SA tenancy officers often act as a go-between with rental agents. Ali is like many asylum seekers competing in the private rental market who encounter systemic discrimination through the combined effects of inadequate income support, language barriers, poor transportation options and the competitive process of the rental application. Using public transport to attend open inspections and navigating the process with little or no English results in many asylum seekers being unable to complete forms to a certain standard or to
engage with agents in a positive way. In an already competitive rental market, asylum seekers face little chance of securing properties through this process. It is not surprising but often disheartening when they face rejection of their applications time after time. Once their initial temporary accommodation expired Ali and his family faced all of these challenges.

Anglicare SA Housing team continues to work with Ali and his family to provide education and ensure that they have access to an affordable property on a long-term basis and support during the tenancy. The family is happy to stay in Adelaide until the status of their visas has been resolved. Ali is focusing on improving his English and would like to work as a volunteer to be able to help other Burmese refugees.

As is so often the case, those who have little and receive even a small amount of support are keen to give back to the community that embraces them and among the first to want to help others.

About the author

Trish Buhagiar is the Manager, Tenancy Services for Housing at Anglicare SA. Trish’s career in tenancy management spans over 20 years and she now oversees the management of about 700 properties, housing some of the most vulnerable tenants including those at risk of homelessness and domestic violence, people with exceptional needs or leaving institutions, pensioners, people awaiting status resolution and arrivals under the Humanitarian Settlement program.
A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING: HOMELESSNESS

The face of homelessness is changing but are our policies and social responses up to it? STEPHANIE CARSON, Benetas Victoria, writes about the experiences of two older women and their advocates. More action, more urgently, is needed so that others are not left behind after years of caring, working and service.

Anne worked hard as a young woman, creating a name for herself as an entertainer on Australian television, saving when she could while caring for her elderly parents. Her television work was casual and intermittent, and combined with long periods of unemployment and no access to the superannuation schemes now compulsory across all employment sectors, she was left with very little when she transferred to the age pension at the age of 65. She’s now 68, her savings are exhausted, and she can’t make her rental payments. Anne has been on the public housing waiting list for many years; and she’s still waiting.

Barb left her husband Don when she was 45, after years of abuse. Don had always been the bread-winner and proud of his role as ‘provider’. When the marriage broke down Barb was left emotionally, physically and financially devastated. She made-do, working three jobs to provide for her two children, living pay-cheque to pay-cheque. Now they’ve grown up and live interstate. She has just turned 71, is retired and completely reliant on the pension. And she can’t afford the rent.

Homelessness is no longer the sole domain of the young person, kicked out of home after a fight with their new stepfather, or the 30-something man, losing his battle with unemployment or drugs and alcohol.

Older single women represent the changing face of homelessness; experiencing homelessness for the first time later in life. Most have limited financial resources
and assets meaning they are unable to hold their place in a housing market which is becoming increasingly unaffordable (Homelessness Australia, 2013). Some, like Anne, face the prospect after leaving the workforce and having insufficient superannuation or savings and are forced to rely solely on the age pension. Other women, like Barb, have their financial world thrown into disarray when they leave a marriage with an income-earning spouse (Homelessness Australia, 2013).

... likely to be staying with friends, living in vehicles, or living under threat of violence in their homes ...

Anecdotally, we know that the instances of older women experiencing unstable housing are on the rise (Anglicare Australia, 2015), however determining the magnitude of this issue is complicated by the often ‘hidden’ experiences of older women. For example, research suggests that older women experiencing housing crisis are likely to be staying with friends, living in vehicles, or living under threat of violence in their homes due to a lack of viable alternatives (McFerran, 2009). Such arrangements are often not captured within the official counts of homelessness, but there is no disputing this is an emerging trend, and one that must be urgently addressed.

As a society, we have a clear moral and social obligation to support anyone experiencing homelessness. This obligation is arguably greater when the group affected experiences homelessness as a direct result of poor policy.

So what can be done to support women like Anne and Barb, and to make sure their experiences don’t play out again and again for future older women in Australia?

Credit where credit is due: superannuation

In comparison to men, today’s older Australian women are likely to have spent less time in paid employment and more time in unpaid caring roles, meaning that many have not accumulated enough superannuation to support them through old age. In fact, older women at retirement age report having an average of 57 per cent less superannuation than men, a situation particularly pronounced for older single women, many of whom are heavily dependent on the age pension (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2009).

‘Caring credit’ schemes have been suggested as one means of addressing this imbalance. These schemes credit carers’ pension programs or funds while
they are out of the workforce caring for children or older parents. Through appropriately recognising and rewarding this valuable caring role, it may contribute to the prevention of housing insecurity among older women, although they are unlikely to significantly impact those women already facing such situations.

Integrated responses to prevention

With housing a matter of state/territory responsibility, and ageing a matter for the Commonwealth, the two have typically been developed separately in a policy sense. Recent aged care reform has strengthened integration somewhat by including homelessness reforms within its mandate. But many commentators suggest that housing should be at the centre of ageing policy. A focus on affordable housing they argue is the logical preventative approach that connects ageing and homelessness policy (Peterson et al, 2014).

The aged care, disability and homelessness sectors all have roles to play in identifying people at risk of homelessness. It is possible to intervene early, make referrals to other service systems and work together to ensure appropriate and coordinated housing and support responses. Workers in these sectors, as Benetas workers have pointed out, are often in a position to identify older, socially isolated people who live in poverty in rental accommodation early on, which could prevent homelessness through identifying viable housing alternatives.

Specialised and tailored housing options

Research suggests that private social housing may be the key response to older people experiencing housing crisis (Peterson et al, 2014). One recent initiative that has demonstrated effectiveness in tackling the supply issues of affordable and accessible housing for older people is the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). The NRAS is designed to increase affordable rental housing by offering financial incentives to businesses and community organisations when they either build dwellings or rent to low-to-moderate income earners.

While the NRAS has come to an end, its ideas and possibilities live on. In providing private properties within local communities, NRAS housing might prove a particularly useful model for older women who wish to maintain their independence, as well as those who might be wary of approaching government ‘welfare’ services for assistance. However, the same research has identified that available stock delivered through these initiatives has reached a point of saturation in many areas, with greater investment needed to support the program going forward.
This page: Older single women represent the changing face of homelessness. A lack of affordable housing, a lifetime of carer responsibilities and lower workforce participation are among the reasons.
Urgency and advocacy needed

Anne’s client advisor, Richard, is a fierce advocate for Anne, and for those experiencing similar circumstances. Richard, who works with Benetas, finds himself concerned most with securing Anne stable housing as her physical and mental health rapidly decline.

As a not-for-profit provider of aged care services, Benetas is committed to supporting all older Victorians to have a fulfilling ageing experience.

‘Our work with Anne is so far beyond linking her in with “typical” aged care supports like Meals on Wheels and a social group,’ says Richard. ‘It’s a daily and urgent challenge to secure Anne appropriate housing; it’s critical.’

The organisation’s commitment to providing accommodation options for older people who are socially or economically disadvantaged, drives its strategic directions and business decisions: 48 per cent of residents living in Benetas aged care facilities are ‘fully supported’ (meaning eligible for and receiving full government subsidy).

It’s vital that Benetas works with other housing providers to ensure that Anne can find a home that is not only affordable, but also suits her lifestyle and health needs and links with her local community, Richard says. ‘This is a huge challenge, one that is made significantly harder with the growing lack of public housing.’

Deb, Barb’s client advisor, agrees.

‘The situation is highly stressful for Barb and it’s complicated by the fact she is female,’ says Deb. ‘As a 71-year-old female at risk of first-time homelessness, she is extremely vulnerable.’

For Anne and Barb, there’s no chance to go back and make fortnightly superannuation payments or put a few dollars away each week for a rainy day. Policies of the past cannot be changed and it’s too late for the benefit of hindsight.

What we do have now though is the opportunity to ensure history does not keep repeating; that older women of the future aren’t forced to seek crisis accommodation at a time when they are most vulnerable and least able to assert their independence, physically and financially.

The opportunity exists to advocate as a sector and as a community to ensure the voices of older women are heard.

And the opportunity exists to support Anne and Barb now, as best we can, through the provision of accessible, appropriate and high-quality services. As we look to the future, we must make sure Anne and Barb are not left behind.
References

Anglicare Australia 2015, *Who is left behind: a profile of deep and persistent disadvantage*, Anglicare Diocese of Sydney, Social Policy and Research Unit.


About the author

Stephanie Carson is the Senior Media and Communications Advisor at Benetas, one of Victoria’s leading not-for-profit aged care providers. She has spent the last six years working in communications in the not-for-profit sector, and has a particular interest in communicating people’s experiences of injustice, and using their stories to advocate for change. In a previous life, Stephanie practised as a social worker, including three years working with young people experiencing homelessness.
MANY ROADS TO RECOVERY

The obvious response is not always the answer as MARK GLASSON from Anglicare Western Australia (WA) finds. With financial counselling services being rationalised, a young woman’s experience of mental illness and life with a new baby show they are needed more than ever.

The catalyst for Jane’s recovery from mental illness came from the least likely of places—her local financial counsellor.

At the time, Jane was a single mum caring for her 18-month-old son. Her ex-partner had been controlling and abusive. He used to monitor her mobile phone records and confiscate her car keys and money. When the physical violence began she was completely isolated from her friends and family and financially dependent on him.

It took a great deal of courage for Jane to leave. She was unsure where she would live with her son or how she would earn money, but she was frightened of what would happen if her partner’s abuse continued to escalate.

When Jane first met Anglicare WA, she was living off a meagre Centrelink payment in a small, but expensive rental. She had fallen into a deep and paralysing depression stemming from the intense trauma of her abuse. The added stress of raising a child alone, making ends meet and finding money to pay off her growing arrears was overwhelming.

Jane later told us how her greatest fear was that her swelling depression was affecting her ability to parent. She was concerned not only for her son’s wellbeing but also his future.

It was not until a local child health worker referred her to a nearby Anglicare WA Financial Counselling service that things began to turn around. The counsellor was able to negotiate with Jane’s landlord, on her behalf, to arrange a more affordable repayment plan over the next three months. To help pay
Top and middle: The benefits of financial counselling are far reaching; reducing the stress on relationships and providing benefits to health too.

Bottom: Anglicare WA’s specialist services include counselling as an avenue to the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme.
for gas and electricity, the counsellor helped Jane to successfully apply for a grant through the *Hardship Utility Grant Scheme* (HUGS). Once the immediate outstanding debts were taken care of, Jane was able to focus on developing a long-term budgeting plan.

With her financial issues settled and sustainable, much of Jane’s stress was relieved. She had the time and energy to focus on her son and her own wellbeing. She engaged with a mental health professional and, with some help from her financial counsellor, explored education and training options with the goal of gaining employment.

Jane now has her mental illness under control and is well on her way to earning a degree in counselling and behavioural science. Her future looks bright, but if not for the availability of free financial counselling things may have ended far more direly.

Jane’s story is just one of many we see every day at Anglicare WA. It illustrates the broad consequences of an unaffordable cost of living, affecting not only a person’s finances but their mental health and relationships. It also shows the importance of specialist services such as financial counselling. Their benefits are far reaching.

*... often a program that grows food, also grows community.*

It’s a funny thing about support services. What often turns a situation around for a person in difficulty is not always the obvious ‘straight line’ approach to the presenting need: a psychologist for psychological difficulties for instance. So often a program that grows food also grows community. A literacy program brings confidence and connection as well as reading and writing skills.

These kinds of specialist responses take a long time to establish. Building the expertise, creating links within the community and understanding individual needs only happens over time. When funds are removed it can be devastating because services cannot be reinstated overnight.

This is why the Western Australian State Government’s decision to axe funding to financial counselling services is so puzzling. A social safety net means much more than benefit payments or one-off grants. It is also the web
of specialist services and the kind of ‘noticing’ that a long-term, in-the-field support service can provide. Such specialist services are not an add-on or a luxury to be pruned in hard times. Anglicare WA is deeply concerned about the consequences for people like Jane and her baby. In times of such fiscal severity, a safety net to catch vulnerable families before they fall into poverty is needed more than ever. This is not the time to unravel it.

About the author

Mark Glasson is the Executive General Manager Service Operations covering all Anglicare WA services since joining Anglicare in October 2013. He has over twenty-five years’ experience across a range service delivery to families and individuals, community development, public policy and services to offenders. Mark has held senior executive positions for the Government of Western Australia and also worked in local government and community organisations. Mark holds a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of New South Wales and a Graduate Diploma in Media Studies from Edith Cowan University.
EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS

Audacious goals, personal connection and all kinds of collaboration may defy the statistics in communities ‘left behind’ as BRONWEN HAYES, Anglicare Tasmania, writes.

Sarah Coker’s smile appears like a glow of light as she describes her daughter Emily. ‘She’s my little miracle,’ she says. ‘She’s still very, very small but I think we are really lucky given what we were told at the start.’ Emily was born too early, weighing 570 grams—less than a loaf of bread. But the tiny newborn was immediately surrounded by people committed to giving her the best possible chance.

Three years later, Emily is growing up in a Tasmanian suburb where statistics indicate that the odds are stacked against her. Her neighbourhood has a name synonymous with entrenched disadvantage. Like many of its regional city counterparts around the nation, there are pockets of poverty in Launceston and the Tamar Valley well-known to locals and clearly mapped by data-sets related to education, health and living standards.

‘Around 30 per cent of children and young people in the state’s second largest city are not meeting basic milestones,’ says Sharon Dutton, Anglicare Tasmania’s coordinator of Children and Community programs.

... good work in isolation is just not enough

‘They are missing out because of poverty and inequality, and we know that if nothing is done, the problems will keep getting worse. At the moment, we’re not even holding the line. The data is showing us that good work done in isolation is just not enough.’
Grim statistics, gaps and forgotten places

From a very young age children and young people in the Launceston-Tamar Valley area are falling behind on many of the factors needed for future wellbeing and security.

‘To reach their full potential, it’s clear what children need,’ says Sharon. ‘We want all children to be loved and safe, have the material basics, be healthy, participating, learning and growing up with a positive sense of culture and identity.’

Sharon says there are a number of transition points that are crucial times for children as they grow. ‘What if as a community we build a net to prevent children and young people falling through gaps at these key transition points?’

‘If we focus on eliminating these gaps we can achieve significant change within a generation,’ according to Sharon.

It’s an audacious goal, but local communities are leading the push for urgent action. Anglicare Tasmania’s Communities for Children program, funded by the Australian Government, is providing backbone support for the growing movement. Committees have been set up in six communities to gather local knowledge and generate new ideas.

‘Communities experiencing disadvantage are saying they’ve had enough—that business as usual won’t cut it anymore,’ says Sharon. ‘Children are at the heart of communities. People are realising that to turn things around, there has to be

Compared to the state average

More children and young people in the Launceston-Tamar Valley area are:

- living in low-income households
- not physically ready for the school day
- demonstrating lower language and cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge
- less likely to have had a routine health check more likely to be hospitalised due to injury
- more likely to have a child notification made about them
- suffering higher rates of assault.

From The state of Launceston’s Children 2014, Anglicare Tasmania; Launceston Child Friendly City Working Group
a common agenda that prioritises children. Communities, politicians, business owners, investors, government agencies and services have to join forces to find innovative solutions to complex social problems.’

The community committees are sharing what they’re seeing in their neighbourhoods. Some of the suburbs are remnants of broad scale housing built decades ago. Weatherboard, tin-roofed homes once accommodated people who worked in low-paid jobs in nearby industries. The mills and abattoirs are closed now; gone are the days when a family could boast of local employment that spanned two or three generations. The committees believe that the rundown environment has a direct effect on how people feel. It also reinforces the stigma associated with their suburbs.

... to turn things around, there has to be a common agenda that prioritises children.

The jobs have disappeared and living standards have fallen. Some of the luckiest locals still have work, but their families are disrupted by the schedules of fly-in fly-out employment, which sees a parent disappear interstate for up to two months at a time. The committees describe their neighbourhoods as ‘forgotten places’ and point out the things that aren’t there—the missing street lights, somewhere to buy fresh and healthy food, a safe playground, family-friendly spots to meet for a chat. They speak of the violence happening in homes, and which sometimes spills out onto the streets, making families wary of public spaces.

Turning things around

It’s July 21 and the community launch of the Every Child Succeeds initiative is off to an uncertain start. Journalists have called to say they may not make it to the event. There’s a siege happening in one of the city’s most disadvantaged outer suburbs. There’s been few RSVPs from invited guests—but as the minutes tick by, community members begin to arrive and eventually fill every row of seats except for the front.

‘Let’s move the kids’ activity table from the back to right up near the speaker’s podium,’ someone suggests. Within minutes, parents and pre-schoolers make a beeline for the table and soon there is a happy hum as children talk and draw pictures together. The television crews turn up. The siege story has proved less dramatic than anticipated; the police negotiators are settled in for a long day of waiting.
Above left: Sarah Coker says Every Child Succeeds encourages people to contribute ideas.

Above right: Communities can help give kids a positive sense of identity and culture.

Left: Families at the launch of Every Child Succeeds in Launceston

Below left: Encouraging children’s learning and participation

Below right: Emily’s community wants all local children to thrive.
Anglicare’s Sharon Dutton begins by sharing videos and photos on a large screen. The faces are familiar; there are interviews with local parents and children talking about their aspirations for the future.

‘I think you’re here today for hope—to see something new in our community,’ Sharon tells those assembled. She explains a social media tool for gathering and sharing ideas. ‘We don’t have the answers and we don’t have the money to solve all the problems. But we want to hear from the community and we’ll do what we can to connect people together.’

Sarah Coker is at the launch. She is on a community committee making contributions as part of the Every Child Succeeds initiative. ‘I used to avoid saying I lived in this suburb and I know a lot of people that still do,’ she says. ‘But I’m actually really proud of what we’re doing and the people I’ve met’.

There are many things about her suburb that she loves and she is keen to talk about its strengths. Sarah grew up there and chose to return after Emily’s premature birth. She was drawn back by a local parent support group.

‘I started going to the group after Emily was born and it was amazing,’ she said. ‘So when my lease was up, I decided to move back into the area. I’d had a lot of bad experiences in the past, but at the local child and family centre there is no judgement. Everybody works together and it’s a place where Emily and I both feel comfortable’.

Sarah said the move was made possible because her grandmother came to live with them.

‘It was always a struggle to find an affordable rental property,’ she says. ‘When Emily was coming home from hospital I looked at so many houses that were not safe. My last rental property was structurally sound but the backyard fences were falling down. I couldn’t take Emily outside. It wasn’t great—she was always getting sick with colds. In the end, my grandmother moved here with us. If it was just me and Emily, I wouldn’t be able to afford to live where I am’. Sarah is balancing parenthood with casual work, volunteering and study.

‘The good stuff that’s happening’

Sarah is feeling confident about Emily starting school next year. Her daughter has access to specialist services such as speech pathology and support for some sensory issues. ‘I like the idea that the kids she is going to playgroup with are going to be her friends at school,’ she says. ‘When Emily was little she had very bad anxiety—now she has all these people around her who she knows she can trust’.
‘I think our suburb has got a bad reputation and a lot of it is based on fear about the way people look or what might have been said about them,’ she says. ‘You don’t hear much about the good stuff that’s happening’. She speaks excitedly about a community craft project.

‘After one of our committee meetings we found out about this project to weave stars and we’re doing that now,’ Sarah says. ‘It’s to show that we don’t agree with violence and we want our kids to grow up with less violence in their lives. We thought it would take a while for it to get off the ground but within two weeks we had made 500 stars. When the community is passionate about something, and there is hands-on stuff to do, it really takes off’.

The hope at the heart of Every Child Succeeds is that communities will not only seize hold of the vision of improving outcomes for children but that their efforts will prompt major structural change that leads to jobs and affordable housing.

The challenge of Every Child Succeeds is to apply dedicated attention to the welfare of all local children, supporting them to grow and thrive; from before birth through to adulthood. The final results won’t be known until 2035, but whatever the outcome, it will demonstrate our society’s response to this question: do we believe inequality and poverty should be shaping the citizens of tomorrow?

When ‘little miracle’ Emily was born at 26 weeks, family, professionals, community, services and systems worked together to help her survive. When such cooperation happens, astounding results can be achieved: it is possible to defy the odds. It’s exactly the kind of focused collaboration needed to see Every child succeeds live up to its bold and hopeful name.

About the author

Bronwen Hayes is the Media and Communications Manager for Anglicare Tasmania where she has worked since 2010. She began her journalism career as a cadet reporter with the Tasmanian regional newspaper The Advocate. Bronwen has provided news coverage and feature articles for a range of media outlets including The Age, Reuters, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Bulletin magazine.
AFTERWORD: STICKING TOGETHER

Launceston’s Every child succeeds, which Bronwyn Hayes writes about here, models a partnership approach. It is a way for people to invest in a common goal; in this case building a community where no child falls through the gaps. When you learn about projects like this, and an earlier one at Long Gully near Bendigo, which Di O’Neil wrote about in Anglicare Australia’s Staying Power (2011), it seems really obvious that working together across our communities to create possibilities for everyone is what we could, and should, be doing. These programs and projects, are something much more sophisticated than carrots and sticks. They take a long time. They need trust.

Yet in Who is being left behind, Anglicare Australia offers national and network evidence of a growing divide in Australia. This great divide, where some of us are being left further and further behind, puts the kind of inclusion and development that Di and Bronwen talk about, out of reach.

Living standard trends in Australia, the paper we commissioned from NATSEM, makes it clear that relative living standards for those less well off and those doing better will move further apart until government and our wider community are prepared to change direction.

It may seem facile to judge how well things are going by looking at people’s income, but we cannot ignore the reality that being a part of our society costs money. For people who are already doing it tough, falling living standards are inevitably linked to ill health, insecure housing, poor educational outcomes, food insecurity, and under employment.

It is becoming very clear who are most at risk of falling behind and remaining trapped in poverty, hardship and social exclusion. In A profile of deep and persistent disadvantage, Sue King and colleagues looked carefully at the data that comes from Anglicare Sydney’s extensive Emergency Relief services. They found that, of people who access their ER, four out of five single parents on Newstart and more than two out of three people living on their own are falling below the poverty line.

We know that we don’t have to leave people behind us. This year’s State of the Family report features stories about the kind of connection, engagement and opportunities that can make a difference to people at risk of that exclusion.

Often it means housing: for new arrivals, older women, young people leaving care. It can also mean the right kind of education at the right time, personal
support, acceptance, and being included. And the physical embodiment may be different: it may be a playgroup for socially isolated parents in one community, a facility for a shared meal in another. Whatever it is, the physical service is symbolic of the need to care for the other, for each other.

This is a watershed moment. For some years the stories from State of the Family reports have been leading here. The chance for Australia to continue defining itself by the story it has always told—that we don’t let down our mates, that we don’t leave anyone behind, that we are all a whisker away from the person down on their luck—is slipping.

We can allow the great divide to become greater and punish those who fall on the wrong side by expecting them to get by on less. Or we can look to invest in them, and in our communities as a whole. We can leave people behind as the research shows we are doing; or we can stick together as some of these stories show we are capable of doing.

In A profile of deep and persistent disadvantage, the Anglicare Sydney team calls for a national poverty plan, an increase in income support, and coherent action on secure and affordable housing. The idea of an arms-length approach to income support, which is a part of that poverty plan, is fundamental.

Until we ensure the social contract really does include having enough to live on and having somewhere safe to live, we’ll never get back that idea of a society that includes everybody and benefits us all.

There’s a lot of theology and philosophy which argues that our humanity is measured by how we treat the other. How we consider and respond to the needs of people different from ourselves. It’s a struggle being played out across the world. But it also exists very close to home.

There is a risk that people in difficult circumstances, as described in this report, are simply becoming ‘our’ other. That when we measure our success as a nation, people without secure work or homes are becoming invisible.

This is why 2015 State of the Family is a call to recognise where we are heading and to make a decision to stop drifting there. It’s time to measure our success by how we stick together. That way no one is left behind.

Kasy Chambers
Executive Director
Anglicare Australia
About the author

Kasy is the Executive Director of Anglicare Australia since joining the organisation in 2007. Previously Kasy managed several small and medium community organisations in the ACT and WA and has worked ‘at the coal face’ in disability, children’s services, homelessness, drug and alcohol and mental health services as well as the senior executive service in the federal government.

Kasy has held numerous board positions including on the board of ACOSS and several ministerial taskforces. She holds an honour’s degree in psychology, a master’s in business administration and a graduate diploma in ethics.
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People wishing to find out more about the report or to purchase copies should contact Anglicare Australia at +61 2 62301775 or Anglicare@anglicare.asn.au