

# SACOSS

# NEWS

Justice, opportunity and shared wealth for all South Australians

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# Summer 2015



**SACOSS**

South Australian Council  
of Social Service



South Australian Council  
of Social Service

As the peak non-government representative body for the health and community services sector in South Australia, the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) believes in justice, opportunity and shared wealth for all South Australians.

For information on membership, we invite you to visit our website or phone us.

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### SACOSS News

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SACOSS News © 2015 ISSN: 1342 - 4655

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## SACOSS HARDSHIP & AFFORDABILITY CONFERENCE 2015

### ENERGY, WATER & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Wednesday 29 April 2015,  
Adelaide Oval, South Australia

Recent stakeholder conversations around Australia have identified the need to engage in positive action. We are proud to present the SACOSS Hardship & Affordability Conference 2015: Energy, Water & Telecommunications to showcase better practice in addressing hardship and affordability.

We'll be bringing together leaders from the energy, water and telecommunications sectors, for one of the most significant gatherings of policy makers, business leaders, regulators, non-profit organisations and community service providers of its kind.

The Conference provides the opportunity to consolidate collaborative approaches to prevent financial hardship, facilitate social and financial health and well-being and support businesses in dealing with their customers and communities.

We really look forward to sharing the day with you.

### To redeem your \$50 discount:

1. Visit [sacosshardship2015.eventbrite.com.au](http://sacosshardship2015.eventbrite.com.au)
2. Click on the red text in the ticket box saying 'Enter promotional code'
3. Enter SACOSSNEWS into the box and press apply (codes are case sensitive)
4. The page will refresh and discounted registrations will appear
5. Choose your registration and click Register to enter your details

\*\$50 discount off Full Registration Packages

\$50 OFF FOR  
SACOSS NEWS READERS\*



## Editorial

**Ross Womersley**  
Executive Director, SACOSS

Welcome to 2015. I hope you got some space to rest, enjoyed some good company, and are ready to rumble again. It's going to be quite a year of work and advocacy for the sector.

We are of course continuing to make sense of the mayhem flowing from federal and state funding announcements before Christmas, and a new federal minister keen to help shape welfare spending and the sector's work.

You would have seen that a number of peak bodies in housing, disability and financial counselling have not had their funding extended. We do worry what this means for advocacy and the capacity to ensure the needs of the people our sector supports - and the needs of the organisations that provide that support - can be properly represented.

SACOSS continues to work closely with the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) on federal matters that impact South Australia. We will continue to keep you updated throughout the year.

In this edition of SACOSS News however, we're shining the spotlight on justice.

Justice is one of those issues which is fundamental to our community. Concepts of justice tend to differ from culture to culture but generally justice can be thought of in both procedural terms - how our laws and policy settings operate - as well as in philosophical, religious and /or moral terms - this idea of social justice.

When we talk about justice at SACOSS we think about both these elements. Sometimes our focus is clearly on issues that relate to procedural fairness (for example, the way that policing practice surrounding a particular law can increase the likelihood of certain population groups being prosecuted over others) while at other times our focus moves to discussions about issues involving a much broader sense of justice tied to the idea of fairness. In this edition of SACOSS news you'll find lots of both.

In late 2014 I had the joy of spending some time with Jason Wong who was in Australia with support from the Wyatt Trust to participate in the Changemakers Festival.

Jason is from Singapore and played a key role in helping to lead and create the circumstances for reform of both the prison system and more lately in relation to child protection systems.

Jason has an amazing story to share. At the time the rate of imprisonment in Singapore was seemingly on an endless climb (a bit like SA today where we have people on remand and sentenced prisoners jammed in every nook and cranny because of overcrowding), the Singapore government had committed to a billion dollar building program to keep accommodating more and more anticipated prisoners.

At the same time there was a small group of people in leadership roles in the prison service who simply weren't satisfied with the idea of continuing to run services with enduring levels of recidivism and unhalting increases in the prison population. Together they worked to build a renewed vision for the service, starting first and foremost with the prison officers themselves. Over a period of time they re-cast their roles as apparent captors and controllers and transformed this into a vision where prison officers would serve as "captains in the lives of the inmates" aspiring to have a direct positive impact on inmate's journey of rehabilitation.

They set about building a focus on individual rehabilitation and worked to facilitate this by supporting the development of education, employment training, family reunification, employment support, and fellowship programs.

While strongly supported by the prison service these initiatives have actually been led by community organisations and volunteers from outside the prison service. The activities were supported through the creation of an independent trust - the Yellow Ribbon Project.

The Yellow Ribbon Project *"seeks to engage the community in giving ex-offenders a second chance at life and to inspire a ripple effect of concerted community action to support ex-offenders and their families"*. Its mission is to unlock the second prison - the community into which prisoners all return following a period of incarceration - by providing support and encouraging family, business, and community to forgive and move on by making opportunities available for people to re-build their lives once they've served their sentences.

← from previous page

The outcomes are remarkable. With 10 new prisons in the pipeline and prison numbers peaking around 16,000 inmates, there has been a remarkable decline which has plateaued in the last few years at around 12,000 inmates. The gains for the community have been massive.

The community gains people who re-enter as willing contributors, with lives that have meaning and purpose with things to look forward to. Prison officers have a deeper mission and see themselves as having a genuinely helpful role to play. The government has saved billions of dollars in expenditure – both capital outlays and in ongoing running costs – and they have embraced new policy settings where the focus is on building skills and capacities while investing early in ways that prevent deeper social problems from emerging.

Now Jason has moved on from the prison service and has a renewed focus on issues connected with families and the child protection system. His latest venture is an initiative called 'Dads for Life' – a national men's

movement focused on promoting active fatherhood and strengthening the role men play in the lives of their children.

If you want to hear more about this initiative you must listen to the podcast of our recent interview with Jason on Small Change [radio.adelaide.edu.au/singapore-prison-reform-captains-of-life-part-1](http://radio.adelaide.edu.au/singapore-prison-reform-captains-of-life-part-1)

In the meantime, I really hope that this edition of SACOSS News sparks concerted and urgent interest in changing the way we approach justice across SA and Australia.

So here's to great work in 2015 for all of us. It will no doubt be filled with equal parts struggle and achievement...but as the late Nelson Mandela reminds us, *"It always seems impossible until it's done"*.

In solidarity, Ross



## SACOSS Honorary Life Member 2014

SACOSS Board may from time to time award an Honorary Life Membership to a member so as to recognise their exceptional contribution to SACOSS and an outstanding contribution to addressing poverty, equity and justice.

We were pleased to present **Marj Ellis** Honorary Life Membership at our 2014 AGM.

Marj has provided an exceptional long term contribution in time, effort, commitment, leadership and extraordinary service in support of SACOSS, and an outstanding contribution to addressing poverty, equity and justice in the South Australian community.

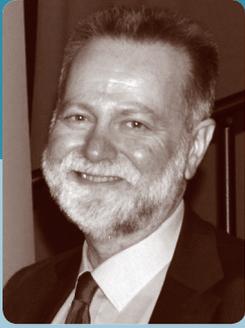
Her passion and drive to improve disadvantage is nothing short of inspiring.

## Board 2014-15

Name	Board Position	Year Term Expires
Helen Connolly	Chairperson	2016
Michael Dawson	Member	2015
Patsy Kellet	Member	2016
Peter Sandeman	Member	2015
Paul Scully	Member	2015
Matthew Woodward	Member	2016
Ross Womersley	Ex officio	-

## SACOSS Policy Council 2014-15

For the full list of SACOSS Policy Council members head to [sacoss.org.au/policy-council](http://sacoss.org.au/policy-council)



## Justice Reinvestment SA

**Mark Waters**

Member of JRSA & State Manager  
Reconciliation SA

A group of knowledgeable and committed people have come together under the banner of Justice Reinvestment SA (JRSA). JRSA members are campaigning to reduce crime and gaoling of offenders, by instead providing effective services for offenders in communities. This group was originally brought together by Senator Penny Wright when she was raising Justice Reinvestment in the Senate, and spearheaded a Senate Inquiry into Justice Reinvestment across Australia.

From the Senate Inquiry, Justice Reinvestment (JR) can be defined as a concept that endorses the redirecting of resources from prisons into programs and strategies that are evidenced to assist in preventing crime. These programs and strategies are focused on the communities that are identified as having the greatest concentration of offenders who wind up in prison. Often these communities struggle with a broad range of socio-economic issues that contribute to the occurrence of crime. Justice Reinvestment is designed to strengthen communities, reduce crime, increase public safety and save money that would otherwise be invested into correctional facilities.

JRSA is co-chaired by Khatija Thomas, Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement, and Ralph Bonig, who championed Justice Reinvestment when he was the President of the Law Society in SA. The group includes the Hon. Dr. Robyn Layton AO QC and high level representation from organisations and institutions such as Reconciliation SA, Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, Koonibba Health Service, YACSA, Red Cross, SANDAS, Time for Kids as well as academic experts from Flinders and the University of SA, and other individuals with interest and expertise.

In a speech delivered at the Australian Institute of Criminology on 31 August 2009 entitled, *Investing in indigenous youth and communities to prevent crime*, Dr Tom Calma AO described Justice Reinvestment as follows:

*“Justice Reinvestment is an idea that originally came from the United States. It is a criminal justice policy approach that diverts a portion of the funds spent on imprisonment to the local communities where there is a high concentration of offenders. The money that would have been spent on imprisonment is reinvested in programs and services that addressed the underlying causes of crimes in these communities.”*

Mick Gooda, the Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission, in a paper presented to a conference sponsored by AnTAR NSW – *Juvenile Justice Strategy: A Better Way*, 20 March 2010, said:

*“In my view, Justice Reinvestment- if done properly - also provides opportunities for communities to take back some control. If it is to work properly it means looking at options for diversion from prison but more importantly, it means looking at the measures and strategies that will prevent offending behaviour in the first place. The community has to be involved and committed to not only taking some ownership of the problem, but also has some ownership of the solutions.”*

JRSA has been advocating to government over the past couple of years for the introduction of JR through pilot studies (five years or more), which are appropriately resourced and evaluated. The purpose of such pilot studies is to demonstrate the potential savings and cost benefits that can be made by providing services and supports for offenders in community - rather than them being incarcerated in gaols or in juvenile centres - and at the same time to reduce the rate and level of criminal offending.

Having regard to research already undertaken by JRSA, with assistance of data from the South Australian Office of Crime Statistics (OCSAR), the primary focus of JRSA is on the disproportional detention rates of young Aboriginal people.

Given that it is estimated in SA to cost over \$200,000 per annum to keep one young offender in detention, any reduction in the rate of incarceration will potentially lead to significant savings. Extending this out to adult imprisonment, the cost to lock up an adult offender in SA is estimated to be \$70,000 per annum. Long term savings from this area can also be seen if less juvenile offenders are later ending up in adult prisons.

In South Australia, we know that the prison system is full to over-crowded and that new prison facilities and associated programs and services are urgently required to meet current needs. JR is not intended to be implemented at the expense of fulfilling those demands in the very short term. JR is a longer term program.

The South Australian Attorney General has already made a pre-election commitment for JR pilot studies in two communities. JRSA supports the Attorney's position and remains hopeful that two community pilots will be implemented in areas where offending rates are high.

JRSA is also trying to raise awareness in the community in general about the benefits of JR as being a way forward to increase safety and having better solutions to the vexed social dilemma of criminal offending and its effects on communities. Over time, it is anticipated that as JR principles gain currency with positive outcomes from pilot studies, JR will gain more general acceptance and momentum.



## An Alternative Approach to Incarceration

Sarah Paddick

Architect & Director – Total Space Design

The South Australian Government is currently investing a large amount of money to address the problems of overcrowding in our current correctional facilities.

Prisoner numbers are increasing steadily due in part to the government's 'tough on crime' attitude and harsher sentencing requirements.

Increasing bed numbers at all our facilities across South Australia is a high priority when looking at how the limited budget available is spent – and in truth, this is a very real and critical challenge.

If you take a step back though and a moment to look at the bigger picture, it is worth questioning if some of the money could be better spent. Just as with the health budget, far more money is spent in managing the end result compared with measures to prevent or reduce people entering the cycle.

There has recently been debate around research indicating a prison sentence is not actually a deterrent. In a study conducted by Victoria's Sentencing Council (released in 2013), it was found that people who served a prison sentence were far more likely to re-offend than those who were given an alternative punishment i.e. fine or community service, for a similar offence.

Recidivism rates in South Australia, whilst being better than other states, still mean that around 1 in 3 people return to prison at some point. Keeping people out of prison in the first place is one area on which to potentially spend money. The other is to ensure that those leaving prison do so with better skills, education and health.

Here are two examples of how we can potentially do better in both these areas. The first is in our juvenile detention facilities.

South Australia recently replaced its facility at Magill with a new modern Training Centre at Cavan. This new centre is a significantly better environment for housing young offenders than the much maligned, outdated and dysfunctional Magill Training Centre, and has a very strong focus on education and training.

An example of where this approach has been taken even further is in Victoria where Ian Lanyon, Director of Youth Justice Custodial Services, has overseen a major upgrade of a number of youth centres. The starting point in the design process is the provision of a school – not a correctional facility.

The school is then made secure to the level required. This change in approach now sees young offenders undertaking equivalent amounts of quality education as their peers whilst being incarcerated, as opposed to less as was previously occurring.

**Rather than falling behind in their education whilst in the corrections system, young offenders are finishing their sentences better skilled and with more prospects than before.**

Another area that can be addressed is the children of prisoners. It is my personal belief that in the majority of cases, it is in the best interests of the mother, the child and the broader community if family links are maintained throughout the incarceration period. One way of maintaining family ties is, where possible, to ensure that children are not separated from their mothers, and if this is not possible, encourage regular contact with their children.

Worldwide experience, supported by British research<sup>1</sup>, indicates that the children of prisoners are about three times more at risk of antisocial and delinquent behaviour, and more than twice as likely to have mental health problems during their lifetime. It's a sad fact that 65% of boys with a convicted parent also go on to offend.

Parent Infant Family Australia (PIFA), an independent not-for-profit organisation that offers services to incarcerated mothers in NSW correctional facilities, writes on its website:

*"All parents, including women in gaol, experience the birth of a child as a time of new beginnings, of hope for the future and connection to a bigger picture. For this reason, pregnancy and early parenting can be seen as*

<sup>1</sup> SCIE (2008) Children's and families research guide 11 : Children of Prisoners – maintaining family ties. SCIE, London



*a window of opportunity for parents to begin to recover from past traumas and make positive changes in their lives. PIFA's group facilitates women's emotional adjustments during early parenting and helps them gain confidence and experience satisfaction in their parenting role.*<sup>2</sup>

This reflects the positive contribution to rehabilitation that parenting can provide to offenders. The innate mothering instinct, when unclouded by alcohol and drugs, and other negative influences, may ignite for the first time in a woman, and become the impetus to change offending habits.

I acknowledge that some might balk at the idea of 'using' children to help rehabilitate their mothers. But if it can be shown that it is also in the best interests of the child to remain with their mother, in appropriate accommodation, then I suggest that the negative connotations are outweighed by the increased potential for positive outcomes.

In 2010 I had the opportunity, via the Catherine Helen Spence Memorial Scholarship, to visit 18 women's correctional facilities in Australia and around the world. The Danish Prison system stood out for a number of reasons - one of which was its different approach to incarceration.

The Danish system has implemented and increased access to a number of alternative options for serving a sentence before secure incarceration occurs. Home detention using RFID tagging (Remote Frequency Identification Tagging), half-way houses, training centres and community service orders, all appear to be widely utilised, particularly when the offender has responsibility for a child<sup>3</sup>.

One of the outcomes of this particular policy is that those offenders who do end up serving their sentences within a prison are at the "harder" end of the spectrum. Notwithstanding this, the desire for normalisation means the Danish Prison and Probation Service has as standard, policies across all its prisons that would only apply to low

and medium security prisons in Australia. For example, independent living and being responsible for cooking, shopping, laundry, having access to leave to attend family events, and access to extended visits with children, or children living with their parent.

In Copenhagen, I visited the highly successful Engelsborg Family House, designed to accommodate entire families damaged by one of the parents being incarcerated, and who needed help and support to rebuild upon the return of that parent. Families can stay there for up to 12 months.

I acknowledge that the Danish culture is different to ours, but I believe that Australia could learn from their correctional philosophy. In Australia, we appear to have political parties trying to out-bid each other as to who is the toughest on crime, rather than developing systems and policies which provide every opportunity for rehabilitation. The Danish enviable recidivism rate of 20 - 25% demonstrates that their approach is far more effective than ours.

The Danish alternatives to imprisonment may not all suit Australians, but there would appear to be room for us to adapt many of the concepts, especially those that keep families together and also maintain a prisoner's connection with society and community by adopting a philosophy of normalisation in their facilities.

**Sarah Paddick** is an Adelaide based architect and director of Totalspace Design. She has 20 years of experience in the design of secure facilities. In 2010 she was the Catherine Helen Spence Memorial Scholar and undertook research into Residential Parenting programs in Australia and overseas.

Her research is available at:

[totalspacedesign.com.au/upload/Mothers-and-Babies-in-Prisons-Accommodation-Study-2010-2011.pdf](https://totalspacedesign.com.au/upload/Mothers-and-Babies-in-Prisons-Accommodation-Study-2010-2011.pdf)

You can listen to our interview with her on **Small Change Radio** at:

[radio.adelaide.edu.au/local-architect-calling-for-child-friendly-prisons/](https://radio.adelaide.edu.au/local-architect-calling-for-child-friendly-prisons/)

<sup>2</sup> [pifa.org.au/foundation/projects/support%20for%20women%20and%20children%20in%20prison](https://pifa.org.au/foundation/projects/support%20for%20women%20and%20children%20in%20prison)

<sup>3</sup> [www.totalspacedesign.com.au/upload/Mothers-and-Babies-in-Prisons-Accommodation-Study-2010-2011.pdf](https://www.totalspacedesign.com.au/upload/Mothers-and-Babies-in-Prisons-Accommodation-Study-2010-2011.pdf)



## What do we really want from our prison system?

**Renee Kobelt**

Community Education Manager - Prison Fellowship SA

That the prison system needs improvement isn't a stretch of the imagination. The system is currently pushed to its limits and is attracting press for all the wrong reasons. Overcrowding, recidivism, prison officer discontent and lack of rehabilitation are recurring themes in the media. And it's supported by statistics.

Let's look at the facts. Our prisons are over capacity; cells designed for one are housing up to three inmates. While the numbers fluctuate on a daily basis, figures released in February 2014 indicated the system was 24 inmates over capacity, with the problem getting worse. At the same time, 35% of prisoners were on remand. According to the Report on Government Services 2014, the recidivism rate is 29% percent within two years of being released (those that end up in back in prison), while the rate including those with Community Corrections Orders is 41%. After two years the number continues to grow, with estimates around 75% within three years.

*The Advertiser* on 2 January 2014 opened up a public opinion on the issues where words like 'failure', 'excuses' and 'action' were thrown around, closely followed by sentences starting with 'to be honest', 'I hate to say it but' and 'bring back'. While these letters offered up a small, moderate cross section of what the community thinks, they still echoed a residual tough stance on crime - one that overflows into our justice system. This hard-line mentality fed by public opinion has meant anti-social behaviour is often dealt with focusing on punitive rather than preventative measures.

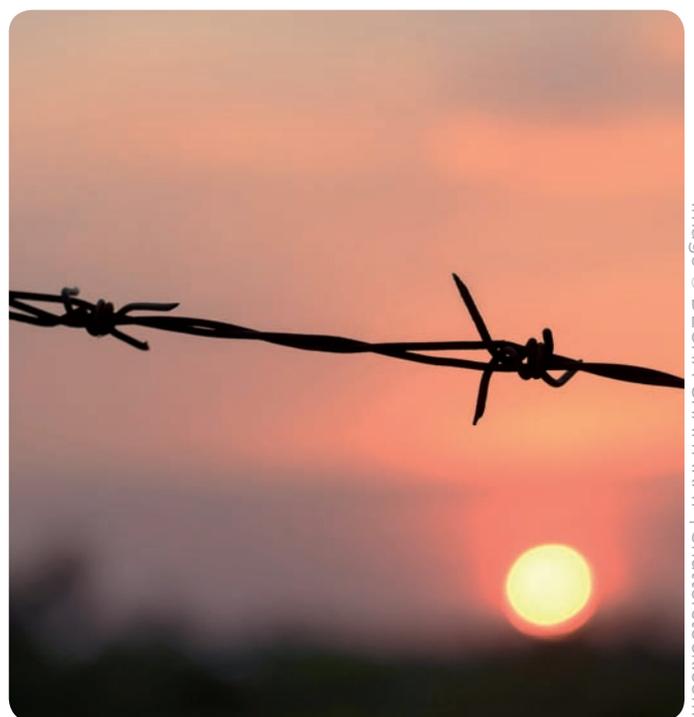
According to the Correctional Services Annual Report 2012-13, in South Australia the average prison sentence is five years and 10 months. Of the people who go to prison, 95 percent will be released. Indifference is not an option; 'rack 'em, pack 'em, stack 'em' has proven to be a spectacular and costly failure that has led to a 'catch and release' problem.

**The real question we need to address is: Do we want them better or bitter?**

Fixing the prison system doesn't just require a policy shift, it requires a whole community attitude shift. It requires an understanding that moves beyond public outrage at injustice. It requires us to look beneath the surface, to see our collective duties and obligations.

In a report presented to Parliament in November 2013 entitled *Investing in Crime Prevention: Final Report of the Select Committee on Anti-Social Behaviour*, two areas of focus for improvement were highlighted: **rehabilitation** and **prevention through early intervention**. The heart of the restorative justice message is understanding that our justice system is there not just to punish, but also rehabilitate and restore.

This has led us to contemplate the question: What does the community *really* require from our justice and prison systems? The answer is a safe and healed community.



At Prison Fellowship South Australia, our programs are designed with both rehabilitative and preventative actions in mind. There is need for widespread action and change, both in the corridors of policy/government and in the community. But this must be partnered with action at a personal, individualised and relationship-driven level with those affected directly with the costs of crime.

Gregg Bisset is working on our **Community Liaison Project** and partners closely with parolees, mentoring them on release, transitioning ex-offenders into the community, housing and vocational placements. The plan is to develop employment and housing options for those who really want to change their lives and a network of businesses who could offer jobs. Employers are usually apprehensive to offer employment to an ex-offender, however if they have a reference and see they have support, employers have more confidence. The same goes for securing housing.

The key to helping ex-offenders stay crime-free is "... getting them motivated and giving them simple help and advice to aid them," Gregg explains. "When they have been locked up for years, life isn't so straightforward." In helping them through the first crucial weeks, they feel in control, less anxious, and are less likely to reoffend. This process starts before release, in relationship building and planning. Gregg will pick them up from prison if they have no one else and help them settle in on their first day.

Two things are important to realise when understanding crime and recidivism. First, there are many offenders who want to change but do not know how. Second, they are people who have made mistakes and can change. Often they are victims.

**A key indicator of anti-social behaviour and offending is intergenerational crime, in particular the incidence of parental incarceration. Children of prisoners are up to seven times more likely to go to prison than their peers. Surprisingly, even with the understanding that they are at particular risk, there are no accurate records of how many, who or where, they are.**

Often the families and children of offenders are left to deal with a unique situation and set of challenges, as well as the financial and emotional fallout of a parent suddenly removed from the home. The children are left hurt and confused. Often the children live and develop in a criminogenic environment, without any reasonable point of reference against which to measure 'normal' or socially acceptable behaviour. They are also more likely to be abused and feel abandoned, feel isolated, bullied at school and have difficulty trusting people.

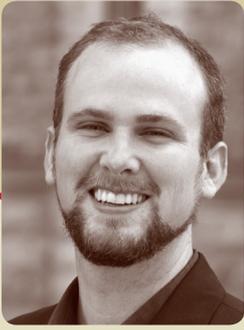
The establishment of the **PK (Prisoner's Kids) Family Care Team** in January 2014 is the deepening of Prison Fellowship's mission to see families reconciled and communities restored through providing real support and building good relationships. By making regular home visits, providing counselling, advocacy, referral, and connecting the families with aid and support, we aim to break the cycle of offending through empowering the children and families and opening opportunities for them. Mel Patterson, our Team Leader explains:

**"Uniquely, the PK Family Care Team has a focus on visiting families in their homes and simply meeting them where they are at. This allows us to come alongside families and identify barriers to overcoming the cycle of crime."**

The team was developed as a result of the employment of a Children and Families Social Worker and the success of our long running PK Camps program. This program allows the children of prisoners the opportunity to go on a camp over a weekend, which is fully funded by generous donors and sponsors. These camps are life-changing, giving children a chance to feel like they belong, as well as teaching them values like trust, friendship, integrity, manners and respect.

There is no easy road when it comes to restoring broken lives. It demands much more than the oversimplified version we see in the media where justice is only measured in terms of lengthy prison sentences under the guise that this 'heals'. Lengthy prison sentences may in cases be necessary for a safe community, but they don't 'heal'.

Let's work towards a system that fosters restoration and builds a safer community through rehabilitation and preventative early-intervention action.



## Can Democracies Respond to the Climate Crisis?

**Dr Peter Burdon**

University of Adelaide Law School

Deputy Chair - International Union for the Conservation of Nature Ethics Specialist Group

**“The strongest argument against democracy is a five minute discussion with the average voter.”**

This glib remark from Winston Churchill, encapsulates a scepticism that many people have about democracies and their ability to respond to a crisis. Democracy, according to this view, is an endless meeting that provides everyone -regardless of their expertise or ignorance- an equal say.

The inefficiency of democratic governance in responding to crisis is acknowledged in the wartime practice of increasing executive power and suspending debate and ordinary decision-making mechanisms.

Following this example, a number of climate advocates have begun considering the benefits of greater centralisation in decision-making to mitigate the devastating scenarios’ offered by climate scientists

For example, in an interview about her new book, *The Collapse of Western Civilization*, Naomi Oreskes argued: “If anyone will weather this storm it seems likely that it will be the Chinese.” In the book, Oreskes (and co-author Erik Conway) imagine a future world in which the predictions of the International Panel on Climate Change have come to pass. With respect to China, the authors predict:

China’s ability to weather disastrous climate change vindicated the necessity of centralised government... and inspiring similar structures in other, reformulated nations.

While not advocating for centralised government, Professor Ross Garnaut argued recently that recent shifts in the Chinese economy away from a coal-dominated growth model, “...improves the chances of the international community meeting the two degrees climate target.”

By contrast, Western democracies have responded to the growing consensus amongst climate scientists by increasing emissions. For example, emissions accelerated after the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was established and between 1992-2012 emissions increased by 38%.

Certainly, the climate crisis *demands* that we ask big questions about the nature and effectiveness of legal and governance structures. My own intervention into this debate asks that we consider whether it is the idea of democracy that is blocking progress on climate change or the current limited version that pervades western society?

**I think that the problem is unquestionably the latter. Put more directly, I contend that it is not democracy that stands in the way, but the dominance of money and corporate interests in politics.**

Perhaps the most distributing example is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC boasts over two thousand corporate members from Wal-Mart to Exxon Mobile and it plays a key role in writing legislation, determining public policies and setting regulatory frameworks. For a domestic example, one could think about the role of mining magnate, Clive Palmer, in repealing the Mining Tax.

Like many important social issues, it is also clear that there is a significant gap between public opinion and public policy. For example, 86% of people in Canada and 87% percent of people in Australia believe in human-caused climate change. Even in America where the climate denial movement is strongest, this belief is still at 57%.



Further to these figures, half or more citizens in South Korea (85%), Japan (72%), Canada (59%) and Australia (52%), have called for immediate government action on climate change.

**If our governments were truly democratic, one would expect to see comparable domestic and international policy and legislation that matched majority opinion. This has not happened.**

Instead, we have witnessed representatives from the aforementioned governments block progress on international climate negotiations; a lack of leadership from developed countries in introducing legislation to tackle climate change and in some countries like Australia and Japan, the rollback of existing legislation that provided minimal government oversight on emissions.

In light of these factors, Western democracies are best described as a plutocracy (a rule by moneyed interests), in which some of the formal elements of democracy remain.

In ancient Greece, democracy was associated with the rule of *demos* – the common people. In contrast, governments have redefined democracy in economic terms where people simply vote periodically for ‘political entrepreneurs’, who seek out their vote like commercial interests seek out dollars in the marketplace.

It is surely conceivable, perhaps even likely, that moves to deepen democratic institutions and dramatically reduce the flow of private money into politics, including closing loopholes in disclosure laws, would result in laws that reflect community and ecological interests better than those made by corporate democracy.

Moreover, attempts to shift Western democracies toward more centralised or authoritarian governance may equally provide an avenue for moneyed-interest to solidify their power and exacerbate what is already abhorrent about politics today.

As long as privileged elites are in control of governance, it will set policy in the special interests that it serves. However, the conditions of survival – let alone flourishing – require rational social planning that takes seriously the needs of the entire community.

At this period of history, either one of two things is possible. Either the general population will take back control of its own destiny and concern itself with community interests, guided by values such as community, solidarity and concern for others (both human and non-human), or alternatively, there will be no destiny for anyone to control. Linguist and dissident Noam Chomsky captured the essential point:

*The question in brief is whether democracy and freedom are values to be preserved or threats to be avoided. In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, democracy and freedom are more than values to be treasured; they may well be essential to survival.*

This article was originally published on ABC Environment [www.abc.net.au/environment/articles/2014/09/05/4081208.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/environment/articles/2014/09/05/4081208.htm)

It has been republished here with permission from the author.

# Aboriginal young people in the justice system – tragedy, travesty or both?

**Emma McArthur**

SACOSS student intern

In 2011, a House of Representatives inquiry into Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system described the continuing over-representation of Aboriginal young people as a 'national disgrace'.

The committee admitted the failure of Commonwealth, state and territory governments to adequately address the issue and drew attention to the fact that, despite the 339 recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the juvenile justice system has actually *increased* in the ensuing 20 years.

In August 2014 I began working on a project, supported by the South Australian Aboriginal Coalition for Social Justice (SAACSJ), seeking to answer these crucial questions: **Why has the level of over-representation increased? What could be done to reverse this trend?**

My work has involved scouring the juvenile justice literature and meeting with stakeholders in the South Australian juvenile justice system.

As a social work student, I have approached this topic with a critical perspective, seeking to understand the broader historical, political and social contexts that impact the lives of Aboriginal young people today.

**The issue of self-determination and participation of Aboriginal people in Australia has emerged as a key issue; it is something that is fraught with complexity and slow to occur, despite being fundamental to improving social and emotional wellbeing.**

This crucial factor appears to be an important missing element, which is compounded by the fact that 'young offenders' experience extreme levels of marginalisation in our society, and remain largely voiceless. This concern has been raised in my conversations with stakeholders, who have suggested that juvenile justice responses are too punitive, need to be more child and young person centred, and culturally appropriate.

## Uncovering the facts

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures show that although Aboriginal young people comprise only 4% of the population aged 10-17 years old in South Australia, they represent on average 36% of young people under youth justice supervision (2012-13 figures).

The number of young people under community supervision has dropped in recent years. Nevertheless, Aboriginal young people continue to be, on average, 14 times as likely to be under community-based supervision as non-Aboriginal young people.

This over representation is higher at the more punitive end of the system, with Aboriginal young people, on average, 24 times as likely to be in detention.

It is worth remembering that incarceration is considered to be the least desirable option for young people and to be used only as a last resort. Yet Aboriginal young people comprise, on average, 46% of young people in detention in South Australia and approximately half are unsentenced.

Literature has shown that Aboriginal young people who come into contact with the juvenile justice system do so at a younger age and many become entrenched within the justice system, with enormous economic and social consequences.

## The cost of bad decision-making

A 2008 report by SACOSS and OARS highlighted the costs associated with the increasing prison population in South Australia. This is a trend that seems to be continuing, with ongoing issues of overcrowded prisons and police cells.

A Productivity Commission report on government services showed that, on average, the cost of youth detention is \$880 per young person, per day. Figures show that in 2012-2013, the South Australian Government spent over \$19m dollars incarcerating young people, nearly half of whom identify as Aboriginal.

By way of contrast, the same report showed the cost of community supervision to be \$109 per young person, per day.

## Factors influencing over-representation

It is widely acknowledged that the lives of Aboriginal young people who come into contact with the justice system are often complicated by a range of factors, including:

- Poverty
- Alcohol and drug use
- Mental illness
- Homelessness
- Disengagement from education
- Family violence and separation
- Child abuse or neglect

It is now more broadly recognised that the roots of these problems lie in the injustices perpetuated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since white settlement in Australia.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody drew the nation's attention to the intergenerational trauma experienced by Aboriginal people as a result of government policies and practices.

Similarly, in 1997, the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, exposed the abuse and trauma, disconnection from land, culture and family, and the denial of education experienced by the Stolen Generations. The Bringing Them Home report raised once again, the issue of the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the justice system and highlighted the links between forced separation and juvenile offending.

## Lessons learned

Aboriginal children are still being separated from their families at an alarming rate by both youth justice and child protection systems.

The links between child protection and youth justice are significant, as often it is the same children and young people who are caught up in these two disparate systems. The irony is that in one system they are labelled as a 'vulnerable child' in need of protection, and in the other they are a 'youth offender' who is held accountable for their actions.

It is well documented that responses to the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in both the youth justice and child protection systems need to include efforts that not only tackle social and economic disadvantage, but also address the intergenerational effects of past government policies and practices.

The fact that families and communities need strengthening in order to challenge complex issues is not a new concept, and yet research suggests that governments have failed to invest adequately in the early intervention and prevention programs that may make a real and lasting difference to the lives of Aboriginal people.

There is also evidence to suggest that systemic factors may be contributing to the continuing over-representation, due to the unequal impact of laws, policies and practices on Aboriginal young people.

It seems only fitting to conclude with a reminder that one of the key principles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is that the views of children should be taken into account in decisions that may affect them.

Equally important is the right to self-determination and participation, as recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. If we paid more attention to these principles in a genuine way in both policy and practice, perhaps we may begin to transform the lives of Aboriginal young people in Australia today.

# Resolving Consumer Credit Disputes for Disadvantaged Groups: The New Consumer Credit Law Centre, South Australia (CCLCSA)

Dr Norah Fahy

CCLCSA is a not-for-profit, state-wide service funded by Department of Communities and Social Inclusion, which provides financial counselling, legal advice and representation in relation to consumer credit issues and legal disputes in South Australia. As our focus is on assisting disadvantage and vulnerable groups with difficulties arising in the areas of credit, banking and finance, services provided by CCLCSA are free.

Assistance is provided both face-to-face and over-the-phone by specialist financial counsellors and solicitors. Financial counsellors at CCLCSA offer specialist counselling on a range of consumer credit related issues. This includes options for debt management such as bankruptcy, debt agreements, difficulty with repayment of home and personal loans, and credit card debt. Our solicitors provide assistance on consumer credit related legal matters and, where necessary, representation.

CCLCSA also currently provides an outreach service through the Credit and Consumer Legal Advice Clinic, which is located at the Adelaide Magistrates Court. The clinic is run by students of the University of Adelaide's Law School under the supervision of CCLCSA solicitors. It operates on the same day as the debtors court, to assist clients attending court for debt-related matters.

As well, CCLCSA provides state-wide legal advice and support to financial counsellors working on consumer credit issues. We further anticipate an active role in community education, law reform advocacy and consumer credit policy issues faced by disadvantaged and vulnerable people, including those living in rural and remote regions.

CCLCSA has been established to meet an increasing demand by low-income and disadvantaged people for financial counselling and legal assistance in relation to consumer credit issues. Previously, free legal assistance was provided by a part-time solicitor at the Central Community Legal Service. Along with evidence provided by financial counsellors and others, it identified an increasing need for access to free legal assistance for debt related matters, particularly for low-income and disadvantaged people.

Advocacy for a free consumer credit service able to meet this need, was taken up by the Consumer Law Consultative Forum. As a result, State Government funding enabled SACOSS to complete a scoping study, which confirmed an increasing demand for specialist financial and legal assistance by low-income and disadvantaged groups, in relation to consumer debt issues. It noted that:

*'Increased cost of living, under-resourcing of financial counselling services, the rise of pay day lending and predatory practices and the expense of the legal system all suggest that there are broad economic and societal forces driving increasing demand for community consumer credit legal services.'* (SACOSS South Australian Consumer Credit Legal Services: A Scoping Study, Final Report, January, 2013.)

The *National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009* requirement for compulsory external dispute resolution scheme membership for credit providers is also significant. The above SACOSS report and the 2010 Uniting Communities report, 'Private Debt - Public Good?', note that for disadvantaged debtors, a lack of legal representation creates unfairness in resolving consumer credit matters. Private solicitors are unable to assist these disadvantaged groups who are unable to pay for legal services.



Subsequently, Uniting Communities and the Central Community Legal Centre successfully obtained State Government funding to establish CCLCSA, which commenced operation on 11th August 2014.

### Our team

The CCLCSA team consists of two solicitors, Dara McDaniel and Belinda Lambert; two financial counsellors, Ian Small and Christine Raymond; project officer Norah Fahy and administrative assistant Eleanor Slattery. Program management is by David Ferarro.

Dara was previously Manager and Principal Solicitor of the Consumer Law Centre of the ACT and has four years' experience as a specialist consumer credit lawyer. Previously, he worked in commercial litigation in the US for nearly 10 years. Belinda has worked in litigation in private practice and for the Crown Solicitor's Office. Belinda has also taught commercial law at various universities in South Australia.

Norah has a background in academic and public sector research and is focused on developing CCLCSA's public profile, as well as developing and strengthening links with community and public sector stakeholders. Christine has worked as a financial counsellor for approximately six years with Uniting Communities and enjoys financial counselling, working alongside clients and helping them make a difference to their lives.

Ian has worked at Uniting Communities as a financial counsellor for the past seven years. He believes in using a holistic approach to financial counselling and holds a TAFE Diploma. Eleanor's role is focused on admin support, answering phone calls, booking client appointments for both the lawyers and financial counsellors, making up client files, data entry and any other admin support required for the smooth operation of CCLCSA.

### Our objectives

The CCLCSA's primary objective is to provide high quality state-wide specialist financial counselling and legal advice, and representation in some cases for consumer credit and debt matters. Our goals are, where possible, to prevent debt and credit issues arising in the first place, to educate the public to recognise the importance of addressing these issues as soon as possible when they arise, and to provide easy access to knowledge about how to get the best advice and assistance in relation to consumer credit issues and disputes.

To achieve these aims, apart from the services already discussed, CCLCSA will undertake a wide variety of public forums and workshops designed to empower disadvantaged groups to know their rights and to assist them to make the right choices in relation to consumer credit and debt issues. In particular, we also aim to raise public awareness of inappropriate consumer credit behaviour and especially to stop predatory practices.

To assist these efforts CCLCSA will also establish and maintain a website to provide easy access to up-to-date consumer credit and debt related information. Importantly, we will also seek to develop new relationships with existing services providers including the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and other relevant community and government organisations.

### Future directions

In the future, CCLCSA would like to be active in campaigns in relation to significant consumer credit issues in collaboration with other Australian-based organisations. Given CCLCSA funding is for three years, a focus on securing extra funding to continue the service will also be a priority.

[www.unitingcommunities.org/financial-and-legal/legal-assistance](http://www.unitingcommunities.org/financial-and-legal/legal-assistance)



# Guidelines for Funding of Not-For-Profit Organisations

**Dr Greg Ogle**

SACOSS Senior Policy & Research Analyst

In the lead-up to the South Australian state election last year, SACOSS – in consultation with a range of sector organisations – developed a 20-point *Better Contracting and Red Tape Reduction Plan*. One of the key initiatives proposed was the development of SA state grant guidelines similar to the Commonwealth guidelines, through which we hoped to get more uniformity across government and to mandate simpler grant processes.

While the grant guidelines would apply to a whole range of not-for-profit activities and organisations, they are particularly crucial for the health and community services sector, as the state government funds a vast number of our services.

The equation and the goal is pretty simple: if we can reduce the administration burden of tendering and acquitting grants, there will be more time and resources available (to both government and our sector) to help vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

The state government recognised this and in its *Modern Public Service* policy document, promised that:

*Grant guidelines will be developed with the not-for-profit sector to reduce red tape and take greater account of social value and responsibility.*

A joint government-NGO working group under the auspices of the Human Services Partnership Forum has been working on this project. On 17 July last year there was a forum at the Adelaide Pavilion to get sector input into the types of things that the Guidelines could contain. But before we got to writing these into guidelines, two critical issues arose.

The first was around the appropriate mechanism for the Guidelines. Should they be: a best practice guide, a cabinet policy, legislation, regulation, or a Treasurer's Instruction?

SACOSS has shied away from a 'best practice guide' which could be ignored, but the exact mechanism was trickier.

However, after much and complicated debate, there is now agreement from government and our sector that we are looking to have the Guidelines as a Cabinet Policy, referred to and anchored by State Procurement Board Guidelines and the relevant Treasurer's Instruction (TI 15 which governs funding).



The second issue was about the scope of the Guidelines. There is currently no legal definition of a 'grant' and over the past decade or more, many funding programs that were clearly grants to organisations have morphed to take on some characteristics of service delivery contracts.

As such, they potentially fall under the *State Procurement Act* processes rather than potential Grant Guidelines. There is an exemption under the Procurement Act for certain community services, but departments are increasingly treating such ongoing service funding as procurement processes.

SACOSS' concern is that the logic of "service procurement" (and the objects of the *State Procurement Act*) tend to focus on important, but narrow, commercial concerns of transparency and return on money spent. They are less well-equipped to deal with broader considerations of community outcomes and personal empowerment, or with the social capital, community support and personal relations that the not-for-profit sector brings to its work – a history and mission which is much more than simply service delivery.

There was also a danger that if Guidelines only covered smaller, one-off grants and not ongoing service contracts, then many of the issues and hopes that the sector has brought to this process would not be addressed.

There was clearly a lot at stake in this definition discussion, but once it was realised that in the process of addressing 'grants' the government and the sector were often talking about different things, there has been goodwill in sorting through the difficulties and there is now agreement that the Guidelines will aim to cover the majority of NFP funding.

The work on writing the substance of the Guidelines will now begin in earnest. Not-for-profit sector representatives will be involved in all stages of drafting the Guidelines and a full consultation will take place during 2015.

Download the podcast of the Chair of the NGO Government Working Group, Evelyn O'Loughlin, talking about the Guidelines on Small Change, 27 January 2015 at:

[radio.adelaide.edu.au/program/small-change/](http://radio.adelaide.edu.au/program/small-change/)

# SACOSS Energy and Water Program Update



**Jo De Silva**  
SACOSS Senior Policy Officer  
- Energy, Water, Climate Change



**Bronwyn Colby**  
SACOSS Policy Officer  
- Energy

## SACOSS Response to Inquiry into Drinking Water and Sewerage Retail Services Pricing Reform

On 24 September 2012, the Treasurer of South Australia referred to the Essential Services Commission of South Australia (ESCOSA) an Inquiry into Pricing Reform for Drinking Water and Sewerage Retail Services provided by SA Water. SACOSS made the following comments on ESCOSA's Draft Inquiry report, which ESCOSA will consider in preparing its Final Report by 31 December 2014:

### Regulatory Asset Base

SACOSS is extremely concerned about the limited Terms of Reference for this Inquiry and in particular the lack of direction for the Inquiry to consider the efficiency of SA Water costs or the potential to change SA Water's revenue. We consider that the primary issue for South Australian consumers is the Regulatory Asset Base, which is currently excessively high and leading to inefficient costs and excessive revenue with a negative impact on consumers. We strongly believe that water pricing should not be a proxy for taxation by other means.

### Complex Public Policy Issue

SACOSS is conscious of the fact that this Inquiry is intended to inform policy, as opposed to an intention that all recommendations would be adopted. In our view, water is not a simple economic good for all users and the Inquiry, including its terms of reference, fails to adequately recognise this complexity. From the perspective of household consumers, especially those with the least capacity to pay for energy and water, the Draft Inquiry Report highlights the limited value of restricting the scope only to economics when considering complex public policy issues such as the provision of essential services.

SACOSS has encouraged ESCOSA to expand on other ways in which the Government can facilitate greater economic efficiency in SA Water's prices in the final report. In our view, there is currently insufficient treatment in the Draft Inquiry Report for a critical part of the Inquiry: not what constitutes efficient pricing but how, pragmatically, it can be pursued within a broader public policy context.

In particular, we would welcome further consideration of how concessions (as the principal agent of social policy) can be made compatible with the economic reform proposals. We value ESCOSA's perspectives on how these (often) competing objectives can be progressed in the pursuit of sound public policy and we trust that Government will too.

### Cost reflective pricing

On the issue of water pricing, we are alarmed at the implications of cost reflective pricing for water that would lead to inordinately high supply charges for residential consumers. We believe the Draft Inquiry Report has comprehensively ruled out a move to cost reflective pricing for water and we will continue to urge the Government to retain its opposition to introducing this method of pricing.

### Billing tenants for water directly

SACOSS is very concerned about the recommendations of Chapter 6 to bill tenants instead of landlords. As raised in our previous submission, it is the SACOSS view that the shortcomings of the current system are in the inability of tenants to access the same consumer protections as property owners - and that a wholesale change to billing arrangements is not necessary to achieve this. We note that the dominant category of economic benefits is the \$47m of "...reduced costs of property managers and/or landlords passing on charges to tenants" and that "...[t]he Commission expects that these savings would be passed on tenants, over time, through reduced rental charges." SACOSS is not convinced that this reduction in rent will actually occur. Further, it is difficult to reconcile the findings and recommendation of Chapter 6 (that tenants be billed directly) with those of Chapter 8, which states that it is not cost effective for all residential consumers to have their own water meter.

### Consumer Advocacy and Research Fund

SACOSS has drawn attention to the fact that the Consumer Advocacy and Research Fund (CARF) established under the *Water Industry Act 2012* remains unavailable to water consumers over two years since the legislation's proclamation.

## Better Practice Guideline for Energy Retailers

The 2014 SACOSS Hardship and Affordability Conference: Stakeholder Conversations (as featured in SACOSS News Winter 2014), brought together energy retailers and community services sector personnel to discuss key areas of concern for vulnerable energy consumers.

Discussions throughout the day focused on the prevention of financial hardship, the facilitation of consumer well-being and financial health and support for businesses in dealing with their customers and communities. SACOSS believes the conference delivered several positive outcomes, including unique opportunities for relationship building and knowledge sharing, and the development of a better practice guideline.

The respectful dialogue, creative thinking and collaborative approach demonstrated by conference participants have resulted in the formulation of the *Better Practice Guideline for Energy Retailers - a collaborative approach to preventing hardship amongst energy consumers*. A summary of the three guideline components is outlined below:

### Guideline Objective

The overarching guideline objective is to work towards minimising the financial stress experienced by vulnerable energy consumers.

There are *Five Better Practice Principles* that support the objective and highlight the priority issues experienced by vulnerable energy consumers. These are:

#### 1. Early intervention

Early intervention is viewed by key stakeholders as a critical tool in the prevention of energy debt accumulation and reducing disconnections for vulnerable and disadvantaged households. This principle refers to the chronic financial stress experienced by many South Australian households.

#### 2. Customer focused capacity to pay

The cornerstone of energy affordability is the capacity for customers to pay their energy bills. Consumer advocates report that this is becoming increasingly difficult for vulnerable energy consumers who are living in financial stress. Successful assessment of capacity to pay hinges upon respectful and meaningful conversations between retailers and their customers that result in fair, reasonable, sustainable and flexible arrangements for consumers.

## Better Practice Guideline for Energy Retailers

A collaborative approach to preventing hardship amongst energy consumers

November 2014



### 3. Collaborative partnerships

Developing collaborative partnerships within the community is an important step in tackling issues that affect vulnerable energy consumers. This principle is underpinned by the premise that energy affordability is a shared responsibility for all stakeholders - industry, consumers, governments and community organisations. Partnerships between retailers and community organisations provide the ideal context for information exchange and innovation on resolving customer hardship issues.

### 4. Measurable outcomes

Measuring the outcomes of retailer hardship policies and the subsequent business processes provides retailers with the opportunity to understand what works well and what can be improved.

### 5. Hardship policies

Retailer hardship policies are an essential tool for supporting vulnerable energy consumers experiencing financial hardship.

*Mechanisms for better practice implementation* are tools for consideration to be used by retailers when adopting better practice and include:

- What to consider when integrating better practice into existing business models;
- A clear focus of the results that are to be achieved and
- Evaluation and review strategies that promote continuous improvement.



# Conversations About Recognition

**Marnie Round**

SACOSS Communications Officer

You should already know about SACOSS' weekly radio show **Small Change**, but recently we've been wondering what might be better than producing one radio show. It seems the answer is to produce two.

Welcome to **Conversations About Recognition** – a joint radio and multimedia project between SACOSS, Radio Adelaide and the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement.

**Conversations About Recognition** is a weekly radio show which takes a step back from discussions about constitutional change to ask an important question – what kind of recognition would be meaningful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

It aims to help non-Aboriginal people understand the views, feelings and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and to think about recognition in their own lives; what do each of us take for granted; what makes us feel acknowledged, accepted and valued?

Every week we're talking to high profile and everyday people from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island and every other background. **Conversations About Recognition** will connect to campaigns for constitutional change to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but the project does not intend to take a stance on current or past proposals, and will accommodate all views. Through in-depth conversations the aim is to share what meaningful recognition looks and feels like to everyone, in whatever form.

In 6 months on air we've already been joined by the likes of Dr Gary Foley, John Pilger, Uncle Stevie Goldsmith, Auntie Irene Watson, Warren H Williams, Robyn Layton AO QC, Bob Brown, Sabour Bradley, and Tauto Sansbury.

Stay tuned for more voices and personal, fascinating and diverse (and divisive) perspectives in 2015.

If you have any questions or you'd like more information contact Marnie Round [marnie@sacoss.org.au](mailto:marnie@sacoss.org.au) or phone **8305 4227**.

**Conversations About Recognition** is broadcast on Radio Adelaide every **Thursday 2-3pm**



It is produced and presented by SACOSS Communications Officer Marnie Round and Adnyamathanha - Kokatha law student and NAIDOC 2014 Scholar of the Year, Dwayne Coulthard.

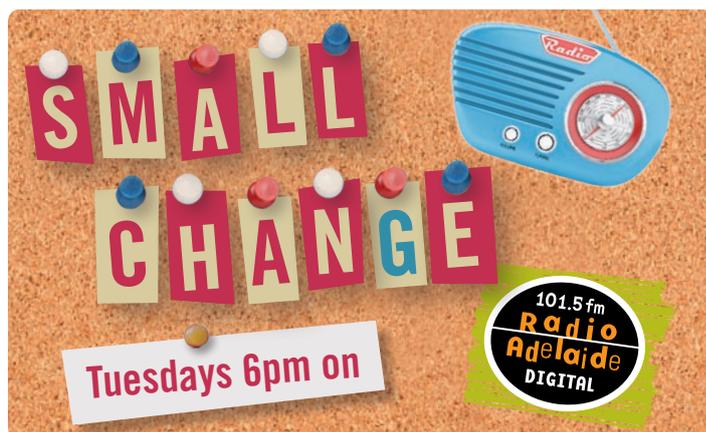
Tune in at **101.5fm** or online at [radio.adelaide.edu.au](http://radio.adelaide.edu.au)

Listen to or download podcasts at [radio.adelaide.edu.au/programs/conversations-about-recognition](http://radio.adelaide.edu.au/programs/conversations-about-recognition)

Find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter [@recognitionyarn](https://twitter.com/recognitionyarn)

**Conversations About Recognition** is supported by funds from the Federal Government through the Public Awareness' arm of Indigenous Capability and Development Program (ICAD), FaCHSIA, and through the Community Broadcasting Foundation.

And don't forget our original weekly SACOSS radio program, **Small Change. Tuesdays 6pm** on **Radio Adelaide 101.5fm**.



# Valued Roles for All – The Keys to a Good Life

# 21

## Joyleen Thomas

Manager - Better Practice Project,  
Aged & Community Services SA & NT

The Better Practice Project has been providing support, information, training, resource development, mentoring and consultation with Home and Community Care (HACC) services in South Australia since 1997.

Valued Roles For All is the fifth in a series of handbooks designed and delivered by the Better Practice Project, to assist staff to think through service models and principles that enhance citizenship, roles and life strengths of older people and people with disabilities. Preceding this handbook are A Unique Life to Live, The Better Practice Handbook, Imaging a Better Life for Older People, and Positive Ageing Stories and Images.



Image © Tom Wang | Shutterstock.com

All of the handbooks have been developed in a way that shares grass roots experiences, real lives and 'imagining better'. The handbooks are also deeply reflective of Dr Wolf Wolfensberger's theory of *Social Role Valorisation*, which speaks to the needs of vulnerable people and the way in which *all* lives offer strengths, skills, dreams and aspirations regardless of the degree of vulnerability. This has been pivotal in changing the populous thinking of vulnerable people from 'captives of care' to valued and unique individuals with the right to a good life.

The handbook explains what we mean by valued roles, why they are important, and how we can prevent the loss of roles, preserve and strengthen existing roles and assist people to find new roles. Whilst most might be seen as valued, some people acquire *negative* roles, that is, roles that community and society don't value.

For example, someone who stays home all day may be labelled as a dole bludger; someone with a speech impediment might be labelled as a 'spastic' or a 'dim wit'. Such labels (and others such as 'menace', 'sick', 'dependant', 'better off dead') lead to further marginalisation and rejection by the 'valued core' of society.

The handbook also explores and describes role communicators (how we look, speak and act within a particular role communicates the 'value' and 'normality' of that role). The issue of imagery is explored in the context of service settings and environment. For example, a day centre environment that is bereft of colour and light, where buildings are shabby and furnishings are poor will convey negative messages about the people that attend (and the staff that work). Each chapter is accompanied by professional photos, authentic stories, case studies and principles for practice.

**Valued Roles For All** will be used in workshops across SA and as a resource for HACC agencies. The handbook is available in print and on the Aged & Community Services SA & NT website.

For further information or to access a print copy phone (08) 8338 7111 or email [bppproject@agedcommunity.asn.au](mailto:bppproject@agedcommunity.asn.au)

# News from Marjorie Black House

## Coming up in 2015:

- Cost of Living Update
- SACOSS Hardship & Affordability Conference 2015: Energy, Water & Telecommunications – 29 April 2015
- Smart Meters Masterclass
- Launch of Disconnection Research Project
- The Death Spiral: Supporting 'On Grid' Consumers Workshop
- Hosting of National Consumer Roundtable on Energy Meeting in Sydney
- Submission to Child Protection Systems Royal Commission

And a million things we haven't even thought of yet!

## Get involved with SACOSS

Help us enhance the voice of the community on behalf of vulnerable and disadvantaged South Australians.

If you aren't already, become a SACOSS member today [sacoss.org.au/membership](http://sacoss.org.au/membership)

SACOSS sends out a fortnightly eBulletin to our members listing brief descriptions of upcoming events, job vacancies, and other items relevant to the community services sector. You can now subscribe to the eBulletin and submit entries via our new website

Visit [sacoss.org.au/ebulletin](http://sacoss.org.au/ebulletin) for all the details.

## SACOSS on Twitter and Facebook

Follow us on Twitter [@SACOSS](https://twitter.com/SACOSS)

And get your mouse-clicking finger on Facebook and LIKE us at [facebook.com/SACOSS](https://facebook.com/SACOSS)

## SACOSS News Autumn edition

If you'd like to contribute to the Autumn 2015 edition of SACOSS News, please contact SACOSS Communications Officer Marnie Round at [marnie@sacoss.org.au](mailto:marnie@sacoss.org.au)

## SACOSS Event Planning Consultancy Service



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A successfully managed event requires a wide range of skills and technical and industry knowledge. SACOSS can offer these at an affordable rate, with SACOSS Members receiving a special discount.

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- content and participant liaison
- assistance with promotions and marketing

To make an enquiry contact **Vivian Clark**, SACOSS Events Coordinator on 8305 4224 or email [vivian@sacoss.org.au](mailto:vivian@sacoss.org.au)

## SACOSS Room Hire

Need a space for your next workshop, meeting or small gathering?



SACOSS has two rooms available for hire at the rear of the offices of Marjorie Black House, 47 King William Rd, Unley.

The Marjorie Black Community Room can seat approximately 60. Facilities include: laptop, data projector, electronic whiteboard, hearing loop and kitchenette. The Daphne Gum quiet room comfortably seats up to 10.

For more information and booking details visit [sacoss.org.au/room-hire](http://sacoss.org.au/room-hire) or contact Vivian Clark at [vivian@sacoss.org.au](mailto:vivian@sacoss.org.au)



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