



Leading Nationally – Responding Locally Building social inclusion in localities on the edge

A Snapshot

Background

Dropping off the Edge¹, a report commissioned by Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, raised Australia's awareness of the existence of pockets of chronic and entrenched disadvantage in the Australian community.

By gathering extensive data and information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Taxation Office, Centrelink, the Australian Health Insurance Commission and state and territory governments and comprehensively analysing them, ***Dropping off the Edge*** provided a map of those Australian localities which experience entrenched and sustained social disadvantage. In doing so, it became the first social disadvantage research report to provide comprehensive information on a national basis.

Dropping off the Edge demonstrated that the lives of the majority of residents of the most disadvantaged localities are characterised by:

- limited education;
- deficient labour market credentials;
- poor health and disabilities;
- low individual and family income;
- engagement in crime; and
- lack of information retrieval and exchange skills.

Key Policy Messages from ***Dropping off the Edge***

- The most significant location specific disadvantage is very deep but is not so large as to be insurmountable (75,000 people live in the 27 most disadvantaged non-Indigenous localities). However these localities account for a markedly disproportionate share of social problems within each Australian state and the ACT. Many Indigenous communities in the NT are also significantly disadvantaged and these provide further targets for sustained interventions.
- The number and characteristics of significantly disadvantaged localities will not change in the absence of constructive, skilfully managed and sustained interventions.
- Without effective intervention the cost to the broader Australian community of sustained disadvantage will continue to grow in both social and economic terms.
- Economic and social participation are dependent on social cohesion and the economic and social capabilities of the communities in which people live. Community building interventions that target community capabilities bring about long term participation benefits.
- Without an intervention that includes a focus on local economic participation and labour market readiness, people of labour force age in significantly disadvantaged localities will continue to be excluded from full participation in our community. They will also remain an untapped resource in a time of a national labour and skill shortage.

¹ Vinson, T. 2007 *Dropping off the Edge*, Jesuit Social Services & Catholic Social Services Australia.

The Government's Social Inclusion Agenda

The starting point for Australia's response to findings such as those from *Dropping off the Edge* is the recognition that social exclusion is a reality in Australia. Despite a record period of economic growth some Australians still have poor outcomes in employment, income, housing, crime, health, disability and family breakdown.

The Government's Social Inclusion Agenda recognises and responds to the geographic or spatial nature of social exclusion as well as that of individuals, families and groups who live in disadvantaged locations but are also scattered throughout the general community.

Aware of the Government's election commitments to social inclusion, *Our Community*² approached Catholic Social Services Australia and Jesuit Social Services to explore ways in which solutions envisaged in *Dropping off the Edge* might be turned into an effective reality.

To begin this process, Catholic Social Services Australia and Jesuit Social Services commissioned a policy framework to contribute to the Government's development of social inclusion strategies. This document provides an overview of the key concepts, issues and ideas within the draft policy framework *Leading Nationally – Responding Locally*³.

The Importance of Place

While some Australians experience social exclusion as a result of their race, age, gender, illness, lifestyle or disability, *Dropping off the Edge*⁴ demonstrates that social disadvantage and social exclusion also have a strong spatial dimension. Mapping over time confirms that such geographic disadvantage is enduring, impacting on each new generation.

The UK's Social Exclusion Unit recognises the role that location plays in individuals' and families' outcomes. The importance of intervening and making improvements in these localities are expressed by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal's aim that "no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live"⁵.

Researchers have identified that socially disadvantaged individuals and localities form a complex web of interactions, and that focusing only on individuals or groups within disadvantaged localities is only part of the solution.

Robson⁶ notes that deprivation is caused not only by the lack of personal resources but also by insufficient or unsatisfactory community infrastructure such as dilapidated schools, remotely sited shops and poor public transport networks and that poor local economic and social infrastructure tends to reinforce and perpetuate poverty.

Robson also concludes that resources which are available, or which are lacking, in the local community can affect how well an individual, family or group is able to manage in times of adversity. If the development of skills and capabilities (human capital) is not matched by local opportunities, including infrastructure, goods, services and a labour market, people are less likely to be able to capitalise on their capabilities and thrive economically and socially. For further discussion of the impact of location, see also Power⁷, Lupton⁸ & McCulloch⁹ in *Leading Nationally – Responding Locally* (pp 9 -11).

² Under the leadership of Dr Rhonda Galbally AO, Our Community is a world-leading social enterprise that provides advice and tools for Australia's community groups and schools, and practical linkages between the community sector and the general public, business and government.

³ *Leading Nationally – Responding Locally, Building Social Inclusion in Localities on the edge* (30 pages) is available from CSSA and JSS.

⁴ Vinson, T 2007 *Dropping off the Edge*, Jesuit Social Services, Richmond

⁵ Social Exclusion Unit, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan, 2001*

⁶ Robson, B. 1995 in Room, G.J. Social exclusion, solidarity and the challenge of globalization, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 1999: 8: 166-174.

⁷ Power A 2003 *Poverty Street* CASE brief 25 London: CASE, London School of Economics

⁸ Lupton, R. 2003 "Neighborhood Effects": *Can we measure them and does it matter?* CASEpaper73, London: CASE, London School of Economics.

⁹ McCulloch, A 2001 Ward-level deprivation and individuals social and economic outcomes in the British Household Panel Study, *Environment & Planning*, 33: 667-684

Evidence emerging from the UK, Scotland & Ireland in particular suggests that locality-specific interventions with an emphasis on renewal and development of the urban environment, public spaces, housing, transport systems and business in combination with policies and programs targeted at individuals living in these disadvantaged localities and facing social exclusion in different spheres of their life, appear to offer the best opportunity for positive and lasting improvements.

It was noted in *Dropping off the Edge* that when social disadvantage becomes entrenched, “the restorative potential of standard services can diminish...and in such cases general social and economic policies need to be supplemented by locality specific ones”¹⁰.

Dropping off the Edge identified how important place is when considering social inclusion. It encouraged a focus on those localities where “a disabling social climate can develop that is more than the sum of individual and household disadvantages”¹¹. Once priority localities are agreed, attention should be given not only to the marginalised and excluded individuals, families and groups within them, but also to improving the locality itself – the services, the buildings, the public spaces and the employment and business opportunities.

Principles for Successful Place Based Initiatives^{12 13 14}

Based on evaluations and reviews in Scotland and the UK, successful disadvantaged locality interventions adhere to the following:

- Long term investment with at least ten year horizons to identify, respond, monitor and evaluate comprehensively.
- Interventions are locally driven by new efficient governance structures at the local level.
- A strong commitment to community engagement and asset-based development.
- Working in partnership with a range of agencies nationally & locally.
- Integration of people and place policies.
- One size does not fit all (localities may be on the way up or way down; outer metro or inner urban etc).
- Minimising stigmatisation – focusing on everybody in the locality; however, ‘hard to reach’ individuals, families and groups require special efforts to engage them.
- Multifaceted – deal with multiple issues and levels concurrently with a mix of short-term and long-term goals.
- A phased approach – starting with the most disadvantaged localities then building in others, particularly those showing evidence of being in a downward spiral.
- Localised targets are linked to national frameworks and commitments.

Possible Approaches & Responses

The draft policy framework commissioned by Jesuit Social Services & Catholic Social Services Australia suggests that governments need to respond to social exclusion and disadvantage in different and complementary ways. It also puts forward options for an ongoing, rigorous approach to improving the lives of those Australians living in our most disadvantaged localities and facing the most significant social exclusion.

¹⁰ Vinson, T. 2007 *Dropping off the Edge*, Jesuit Social Services & Catholic Social Services Australia, p ix

¹¹ Ibid, p ix

¹² Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University 2005, *New Deal for Communities 2001-2005: An Interim Evaluation*

¹³ Communities Scotland, 2002, Precis 11, *Community regeneration and neighbourhood renewal: a review of the evidence*

¹⁴ Sure Start, UK

Government approaches

To effectively counter disadvantage, governments need to employ a three-pronged approach. They need to ensure a positive macro environment from strong economic and labour market settings; they need to provide universal goods and/or services to all individuals or members of a group (horizontal equity); and they need to target individuals or localities with additional goods or services to reduce the gap between them and the rest of the community (vertical equity)¹⁵.

To respond to entrenched disadvantage well, a further combination of interventions is needed: short term interventions which provide a kick-start or immediate remedial support; long term interventions which create sustainable change; and prevention and early intervention approaches to overcome the intergenerational transfer of social disadvantage and to prevent the downward slide of some communities¹⁶.

Research has also shown that strengthening the capacities of individuals and improving the *collective efficacy* (the mutual trust and willingness to intervene for the common good that is associated with reduced crime¹⁷ and better health¹⁸, among other social benefits) within disadvantaged localities is key to sustained change. In order for interventions to be successful, they must not only be useful in their own right, but also serve to strengthen the community overall. Approaches that build on community assets, improve social cohesion and involve local people in decision making are the essential means to success.

Leading Nationally – Responding Locally suggests how locality specific interventions could operate both nationally and locally, and contains a number of features of the other successful locality specific responses tested in Ireland, Scotland and the UK.

In brief¹⁹, it proposes:

- Defining a 10-15 year timeframe for investment in disadvantage localities;
- Setting objectives for the Social Inclusion agenda which are based on the key issues most commonly associated with sustained disadvantage (limited education; deficient labour market credentials; poor health and disabilities; low individual and family income; engagement in crime; and lack of information retrieval and exchange skills);
- Establishing targets which are linked to the objectives, consistent with other national frameworks and are evidence-based;
- Allocating targets to Ministers across a range of portfolios who are responsible for their achievement;
- Developing an *Australian Index of Disadvantage* to measure improvements in disadvantaged localities and to identify those localities heading into a downward spiral to enable early intervention;
- Using the Social Inclusion Unit and the Social Inclusion Board to monitor and report progress in disadvantaged localities;
- A comprehensive, rigorous and transparent evaluation of the interventions;
- New dedicated locality-based governance arrangements which operate as partnerships and guide decisions about local interventions²⁰; and
- A not-for-profit *Social Inclusion Technical Support Network* to support disadvantaged localities with expert advice and assistance with planning, development and implementation of localised initiatives.

¹⁵ *Leading Nationally – Responding Locally*, 2008 Jesuit Social Services & Catholic Social Services Australia, pp 12-13,

¹⁶ *Ibid* p 12

¹⁷ Sampson, R. J., (1997) "Neighbourhoods and Violent Crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy," *Science*, V. 277, No. 5328, 918-925

¹⁸ Browning, C. R., Cagney, K. A., (2002) "Neighbourhood Structural Disadvantage, Collective Efficacy, and Self-Rated Physical Health in an Urban Setting," *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, V. 43, (December), 383-399

¹⁹ *Ibid* pp 17 – 16, Attachment A & Attachment B

²⁰ *Leading Nationally – Responding Locally*, proposes the establishment of a specific program to respond to the most disadvantaged locations