



Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence
PO Box 6021, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare Dependence*.

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services has over 40 years' experience working with individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage. Our work draws our attention to the multiple and interrelated factors that cause disadvantage, push people to the margins, diminish communities' capacity to shape their future, and damage the natural environment we all depend on. We work with people with significant barriers to participation and social and economic inclusion. We accompany them, address their needs and partner with community, business and government to support them onto a pathway to education, training and employment.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence participants' lives and improve approaches to address long term social challenges.

Jesuit Social Services' programs, practices and policies are informed by Catholic Social Teaching principles. We believe in the inherent dignity of the human person. Jesuit Social Services imagines a society which serves and supports the community, and where individual rights and the common good are mutually supportive. We hold that worth of a person is not limited to their employment status, and believe that civic participation and community contribution can be measured in many different ways.

The Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare Dependence

The Terms of Reference for this Inquiry call on submitters to examine the reasons for welfare dependence, with particular focus on why some families require welfare assistance for short periods only and why others become 'trapped' in the system. The Discussion Paper calls for responses from stakeholders on how to develop welfare policy and programs that reduce the dependency of family and children on welfare support.

Jesuit Social Services challenges the fundamental premise underlying the Terms of Reference and Discussion Paper. Intergenerational access to income support should not be viewed as a problem in and of itself. Rather, it should be understood as a symptom of the intergenerational disadvantage that some individuals and communities experience. It is this complex, entrenched disadvantage that should demand the attention of governments. Jesuit Social Services maintains that intergenerational disadvantage must be addressed with both short and long-term investments and initiatives.

Addressing disadvantage: Responses

In a decent and just society, individuals have access a social safety net that adequately supports them in times of crisis or need. In Australia, our income support payments system is in need of urgent reform to bring it up to standard. **Jesuit Social Services supports the call to immediately raise Newstart by \$75 to lift recipients out of poverty and reflect cost-of-living demands. An independent social security commission should be established to guide parliament on future changes to income support rates and monitor indexation settings.**

The Select Committee's Discussion Paper calls for responses to the Inquiry that are not based on a dichotomous interpretation of disadvantage and welfare dependence as either structurally or individually driven.

Our work with people experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation shows us individuals may need support to be equipped with the right skills and training to attain meaningful employment. Jesuit Social Services' education and training programs support participants to gain the essential vocational and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to employment. While the right support can assist people to secure meaningful work, we cannot ignore the structural barriers to employment many people face.

Over nearly 20 years, Jesuit Social Services has been producing ground-breaking research into locational disadvantage across Australia. In 2015, Jesuit Social Services along with Catholic Social Services Australia, released the findings of its fourth *Dropping off the Edge 2015 Report (DOTE)*,ⁱ which shows clearly that complex and entrenched disadvantage is experienced by a small but persistent number of locations in each state and territory across Australia.

To effectively and practically address complex intergenerational economic and social marginalisation, place-based approaches are needed over the long-term.

Place-based approaches are centred on building stronger, more cohesive and resilient communities. They focus on the causes rather than the consequences of entrenched disadvantage, embracing prevention and early intervention in their effort to resolve issues before they escalate.ⁱⁱ Place-based approaches aim to empower communities to develop and deliver local solutions to entrenched disadvantage over the long term by bringing together members of the community, community organisations, businesses, government and public services like schools and health centres. Individuals and groups work together to design and implement innovative solutions to complex social issues specific to their community, drawing on local strengths, opportunities and goals.ⁱⁱⁱ

Without a sustained, collaborative, long-term commitment across the government, community and business sectors, there is a significant risk that some of Australia's most severely disadvantaged communities will continue to 'drop off the edge'. The web of disadvantage can be broken effectively by a multi-layered, cooperative and coordinated strategy that is owned and driven by the community. This strategy should be:

- **Targeted** – Concentrated to specific areas of the most severe disadvantage
- **Tailored** – Meet the community's needs and responding to the unique mix of issues facing the community
- **Integrated**– Recognising the web of multiple and interconnected causes of disadvantage
- **Cooperative** – Responses are founded on a strong relationship between government and departmental portfolios, integrated community initiatives and coordination between different levels of government
- **A long term horizon** – A long-term commitment of 20 years to address complex, entrenched disadvantage

- **Community owned and driven** – Community leaders drive the agenda, recognising the strength within communities and work with them to build capacity, generate action, attract external resources, and maintain direction and energy
- **Engaged at the individual, community and national levels** – Recognising the complex interplay of the individual, their family circumstances, their community, and the broader social and economic environment in causing and addressing disadvantage.

Critically, place-based approaches must encompass interventions from birth across the life span, such as early childhood, school, mental health, justice and crime prevention, and building the capacities and resources of local communities.

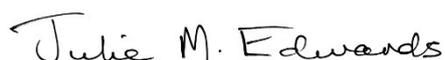
Listening to those with lived experience

The Committee has expressed its interest in ‘moving beyond’ anecdotal evidence. However, Jesuit Social Services firmly believes that the voice of people experiencing complex, entrenched, intergenerational disadvantage must be at the forefront of policy formation.

In order to ensure the Inquiry develops a holistic and grounded view of the lived experience of entrenched disadvantage, and the strengths and resilience displayed by people living in communities facing multiple challenges, we would be please to invite the Select Committee to a hearing that includes staff working alongside vulnerable groups and, where appropriate, participants of our programs.

Jesuit Social Services also supports the position of Catholic Social Services Australia, as put forward in their submission to the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Julie Edwards – CEO, Jesuit Social Services

ⁱ Vinson, T. & Rawsthorne, M. (2015). *Dropping off the Edge 2015*. Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, <http://www.dote.org.au/findings/full-report/>

ⁱⁱ Victorian Council of Social Service. (2016). *Communities Taking Power: Using Place-Based Approaches to Deliver Local Solutions to Poverty and Disadvantage*. Pp.7-9.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.