



Jesuit Social Services

**Victorian State Election Platform:
Settlement and Community Building**

November 2018



The Victorian State Election.

Elections are times for asking what kind of a society we want. They invite us to name our own vision. At election times, too, politicians offer us their visions for a good society. We have a responsibility to assess what they offer, and have an opportunity to advocate for change.

Jesuit Social Services accompanies and works with people and communities who are excluded and isolated.

Our work with people on the margins 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. This understanding challenges us to take account of these challenges in our accompaniment and our advocacy. We bring together 'doing' and 'influencing' to ensure our programs and advocacy are shaped by our practice wisdom, evidence and rich heritage.

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.

Our doing and influencing spans:

- Disadvantaged and marginalised communities
- People with complex and multiple needs
- People involved or at-risk of entering the youth and adult justice systems
- Boys and men who are in trouble or causing trouble
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People and families seeking asylum
- Education, training and employment

The experiences of vulnerable people are diverse. So are their needs. Effective responses demand programs that can be tailored to individual needs, constant adaptation for successful delivery, and sustained commitment from governments. Above all, they must be founded on the recognition that every human being deserves a second chance.

Settlement and community building.

The elected Victorian government must work to build communities that enable individuals to thrive and flourish. This means supporting the most marginalised members of our community and investing in strategies that promote social cohesion.

National or state-wide policies and centrally-designed services are less effective at tackling the interrelated causes of place-based disadvantage than policies targeted to the needs of a specific community.¹ By contrast, place-based approaches work to tackle geographically concentrated social disadvantage by building stronger, more cohesive and resilient communities. They focus on the causes rather than the consequences of entrenched disadvantage, and aim to empower communities to develop and deliver local solutions to disadvantage over the long term.

By tailoring solutions to specific disadvantaged locations, place-based approaches are better equipped to deal with the complex nature of localised disadvantage.² Challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation and an expanding urban footprint in our State should feature in these place-based approaches.

This must incorporate support for newly arrived people to settle and contribute to our shared community. The experience of migrant groups in Australia is often marked by inequality and structural barriers to community engagement. Jesuit Social Services calls for investment in established programs which support newly arrived and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to access education and meaningful employment.

Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia's research over a number of years has consistently demonstrated that disadvantage is entrenched in certain geographical locations in Victoria.³ Outcomes such as intergenerational unemployment, lower levels of educational achievement and higher rates of criminal convictions are endemic to particular postcodes and communities.

Our asks

We call for the next state government to:

- Further invest in Corporate Diversity Partnerships for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities with high unemployment rates.
- Fund Jesuit Social Services' Homework Club.
- Adopt place-based approaches to address localised, entrenched disadvantage, and promote ecological justice.
- Prioritise ecological health and justice in all policy.
- Introduce ecological audits and guidelines for all government decisions and departments.
- Invest in research and advocacy on environmental indicators of disadvantage to inform urban planning and environmental health policies and law.

Further invest in Corporate Diversity Partnerships for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities with high unemployment rates.

Employment fosters broader participation in society, provides a sense of purpose, and creates opportunities to become contributing members of the community. Significant barriers to employment faced by newly arrived and CALD communities can limit their sense of integration into the Australian community. Individuals from CALD backgrounds, despite having professional qualifications, may lack local work experience and can find themselves unable to work in their professions.

Based on our experiences engaging with migrant communities seeking employment, Jesuit Social Services formed a partnership with the National Australia Bank in 2009 to establish the African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP). The AAIP fosters workplace inclusion for disadvantaged and underemployed skilled African migrants by addressing the initial barriers – including a recruitment landscape which is highly influenced by bias (conscious or unconscious) – which can often prevent entry into the Australian workforce.

While the AAIP produces a social good in broadening the employment prospects of disadvantaged migrants, it also provides significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers. The program has been successful because it offers the private sector partner the competitive advantage of bringing experienced, skilled, yet underemployed, job seekers to their attention. It also serves to benefit the private sector through workplace diversification, in boosting staff engagement and in enhancing corporate reputation. More generally, the AAIP promotes community cohesion.

Since commencement in 2009, over 380 participants have taken part in the AAIP across Melbourne and Sydney. As we head into our ninth year, more than half of the alumni are still working at NAB. In the last eighteen months, this figure has been above 85 per cent at the end of each round.

Building on the highly successful AAIP, we have developed the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program to help companies connect with a diverse talent pool of qualified people who seek an opportunity to obtain the corporate experience and professional networks needed to launch their careers. We have now partnered with the Australian Tax Office and John Holland, one of Australia's largest construction companies.

Jesuit Social Services calls for more Corporate Diversity Partnerships to be developed, adapted from the AAIP model, to offer other disadvantaged CALD groups corporate work experience and an induction into Australian workplace culture and practice.

Fund Jesuit Social Services' Homework Club.

Since 2004 Jesuit Social Services has run the Flemington Homework Club, providing a welcoming, safe, stable and stimulating environment for local refugee and migrant school students to receive educational support and assistance.

Flemington Homework Club successfully provides a safe space for young refugee and migrant students to remain engaged in education by allowing them access to learning supports, such as targeted tutoring and use of computers, laptops with internet access, and printers.

Students and their families are supported to gain a sense of belonging and a positive identity through regular social engagement with their local community.

The Homework club also encourages the development of self-esteem and positive mental and physical health, with the recent introduction of weekly workshops.

The Homework Club actively draws newly arrived families into the community, while providing tangible and practical support. Community and educational engagement enhances social cohesion, benefiting society more broadly. In October this year, it received a Community-run Out-of-School-Hours Learning Support Programs Award from the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

Jesuit Social Services relies on non-government grants to fund this important program. We call on the elected Victorian government to fund the Homework Club on an ongoing basis.

Adopt place-based approaches to address localised, entrenched disadvantage, and promote ecological justice.

*Dropping Off the Edge 2015*⁴ charted the vulnerability of certain Australian neighbourhoods against a range of social, economic, health and educational forms of disadvantage. We found that complex and entrenched disadvantage is experienced by a small but persistent number of locations in each state and territory across Australia.

Emerging evidence illustrates that such factors are also strongly associated with environmental risks and vulnerabilities. In other words, this same small number of postcodes is also likely to experience disproportionate ecological injustice. Indicators of ecological injustice can range from fewer green open spaces and greater site contamination, like soil contamination through siting of toxic waste dumps and air pollution through industrial activity. It can also be marked by higher density, resulting in fewer natural features such as trees, flora and fauna, or 'food deserts'- localities lacking affordable, nutritious, easily accessible food sources.

Place-based approaches are an effective and practical means of tackling complex, intergenerational economic and social marginalisation and disadvantage. Place-based approaches work to tackle geographically-concentrated social disadvantage by 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.⁵

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. Following a place-based approach, these 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.⁶ The pursuit of ecological justice must be foundational in any place-based approach.

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.

Jesuit Social Services calls on the elected Victorian government to adopt a holistic and pragmatic approach to addressing place-based disadvantage and promoting ecological justice.

Prioritise ecological health and justice in all policy.

Introduce ecological audits and guidelines for all government decisions and departments.

Invest in research and advocacy on environmental indicators of disadvantage to inform urban planning and environmental health policies and law.

In an increasingly complex era of climate crisis and environmental degradation, the most marginalised and vulnerable are often the least responsible for ecological risks and threats, but are the most affected by their emergence. Jesuit Social Services advocates for a holistic approach to social justice that considers human communities and ecologies as interdependent. Ecological justice is a holistic framework inclusive of both social and environmental justice.

We call on the elected Victorian government to prioritise ecological health and justice in all policy. We call for the introduction of ecological audits and guidelines for all government decisions and departments.

The elected government must strengthen procedural and regulatory mechanisms to protect communities. For example, for decisions regarding the presence of toxic sites within or proximate to communities, regulatory frameworks must be adopted that allow community access to all the necessary information on the impacts and plans for those sites.

At the same time, work must be done to ensure that community consultation does not become tokenistic. Decisions affecting local environments must be based on genuine dialogue with the communities directly impacted, with community input in decision-making adopted as a core principle. To ensure this, there must be rigorous and accessible procedures for community engagement, input and agency.

These measures must be accompanied by education and research on ecological justice and why it matters. This means increasing collaboration between the community sector and organisations that map environmental risks and harms.

We recommend investment in research and advocacy on environmental indicators of disadvantage to inform urban planning and environmental health policies and law.

Endnotes

- 1 Brotherhood of St Laurence. (2015). *What Next For Place-Based Initiatives to Tackle Disadvantage? A Practical Look at Recent Lessons for Australian Public Policy*. Retrieved from <http://youthlaw.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/What-Next-for-Place-Based-Initiatives-to-Tackle-Disadvantage.pdf>
- 2 Victorian Council of Social Service. (2016). *Communities Taking Power: Using Place-Based Approaches to Deliver Local Solutions to Poverty and Disadvantage*. Retrieved from https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Communities_Taking_Power_FINAL_WebUpload.pdf
- 3 Vinson, T., & Rawsthorne, M. (2015). *Dropping Off the Edge 2015: Persistent communal disadvantage in Australia*. Melbourne, Vic.: Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.
- 4 Vinson, T., & Rawsthorne, M. (2015). *Dropping Off the Edge 2015: Persistent communal disadvantage in Australia*. Melbourne, Vic.: Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.
- 5 Victorian Council of Social Service. (2016). *Communities Taking Power: Using Place-Based Approaches to Deliver Local Solutions to Poverty and Disadvantage*. Retrieved from https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Communities_Taking_Power_FINAL_WebUpload.pdf
- 6 Ibid.