

## SEMINAR C – FAIR GO OR FAIR GAME

### *When did "Welfare" become a 4 letter word?*

#### Key themes / issues / questions arising from discussion:

#### Nola Kunnen

Welfare reform

Self reliance in current welfare policy.

Current students who are parents: will they be able to finish studies due to impacts of welfare reform?

- When did change happen?
- What informs the change?
- What's different about the way we think about welfare?
- How/why did these ideas become popular?

Vocabulary: mutual obligation, passive dependency, participation reciprocity, no rights without responsibility.

Economic reform; what does welfare look like. Retreat from welfare state- history of 20 years.

Welfare contributes to dependency: rethinking what welfare is- not view welfare as negative.

Discourse: Welfare- targeted, selective, eligibility. Directing it to people who have an established need.

2 themes-

- Welfare contributes to dependency and is negative.
- Discussion about welfare- the relationship between government and services

Negative and stigmatised term. Dependency- negative and moral concerns arose around industrialisation, recognised rights to property, voting, civil and political rights- property, economic independence. Dependency framed as a problem. Morally suspicious of people who are dependent.

Define identity by participation in labour market participation.

Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead- dependency theories. Unbelievable theories to something that is now so common. Power of ideas and discourses- what we now accept.

Security- people not able to attain for themselves. Promote a sense of social citizenship in order to achieve the aims of a modern social democratic nation- the old social consensus. Fair go, equity. Government and citizens on welfare- active engagement in policy debate.

State and citizens- needing to demonstrate that they've met their responsibilities. Contribute to society.

Active citizenship to morally questionable dependency.

Supervision and monitoring- service providers role.

How are these ideas maintained?

Politics of community

## **Lin Hatfield-Dodds**

Dirty Welfare words

Shirker

Lazy

Rorting

Single mum

Moved from right of citizen- social safety net. Not contributing to the strong economy- then no value.

Mutual Obligation- what it actually means. Dependence, Independence, Interdependence. State will micro-manage, eg: recent announcement of compulsory centrepay.

Government knows best- not true. Government doesn't know or know best. Now outsourcing services- eg: employment. Service construction and delivery lies outside of government.

Expertise is also outside of government in regarding to social policy.

1.5 million Australians

- Poverty postcodes
- Retreating into domestic caves.
- Mondo grass and macchiato- individual
- Consumers rather than citizens
- Economy a means not an end.

Issues

- People make the best choices that they can.
- Lack of resources and co-ordination
- Intergenerational unemployment- not expecting ever to participate in their communities
- Structural ageing of the population.

Sector supports the participation agenda, but welfare is not just about the labour force. Real participation; valuable participation.

Welfare to work package

Key issues: off pensions and on to allowances

Investment in employment assistance. What the government is providing versus what is needed. 1 July- spike in need.

Penalties- deserving and non-deserving. Breaches for 8 weeks.

Sector- taken our eye off the ball. Vision. Where do we want to be in the future.

Real opportunity to claim it back. Continue to have the internal dialogue, but we also need to get out there. Out to Australians that we don't usually have dialogue with.

## **Senator Rachel Siewert**

Government control of Senate and the impact of this.

Legislation was rushed through- IR, welfare to work.

IR- support to lower the minimum wage.

Welfare to Work- obvious the impacts it was going to have: ignored.

Holes in the welfare to work legislation. Eg- Family carers- foster carers were given an exemption from the going to work. Family carers- answer was "not many of them, so don't worry". Over 40% of children are being cared for out of foster care- family carers forced from welfare to work.

Family Law- Facts fit that women fit within the statistics of domestic violence- number of murders. Women are going to be strongly discouraged to report domestic violence. Government again, didn't listen.

Cutting carers payments- only 12 weeks allowed, not 52 weeks. Carers are in the lowest socio-economic group. Again, the government ignored the impact/detriment of legislation.

Impact on community; our sector (NGO) immense. ACOSS survey- people being turned away from services.

Things the government hasn't considered;

- Childcare: forcing single mothers back to work
- Family Law: requiring mediation, unless you can claim exemption then you have to participate. Not enough relationship services- lack of skilled staff.
- Family Law: meaningful relationships and the safety of a child. These can be mutually exclusive. Domestic Violence situation.

NGO sector will be expected to, with limited resources, pick up after the issues. Government running an anti-NGO agenda. Advocacy not on.

Race to the bottom for the provision on services. Organisations are forced into these positions: this is all the money that is available.

NGO's are so tied up in providing services, taken our eye off the ball. Deliberate attempt to silence our dissent.

We need to reserve the time to get over this hurdle.

Third sector; NGO's are the imagination of society. The bad ideas have been coming out of government. The good ideas come from the NGO sector.

## **Mary Jenkins**

Speaking on behalf of unemployed; working part-time or casual. Surviving without a living wage. If you lose your job: lazy, idle, looking for ways to rip off the system. Media perpetuates these negative stereotypes: not enough research, right of reply.

On the radio the other day a speaker regarding smartcards: Mentioned: Dole bludgers and welfare cheats- at least 10 times

Both major parties support work for the dole. People with disabilities, mental illness; forced to participate. Many of the jobs are rubbish. Eg- mature workers retrenched; slave labour – gutter cleaning. Skills they have are not used as part of work for the dole. Road out of poverty; secure job.

Investment in education and training; not there. Limited job mobility/training, particularly work for the dole as their time is taken up.

Idea of work: task you did to give you time for leisure. Health of nation is at stake. Positive work into the future: communities actively involved to ensure the survival of their community. YES book, innovative ideas from across WA. Solutions are offered to counteract the decline of communities. New concepts. We need to work together in the spirit of health sustainable lifestyle.

British government; \$95 million in new inventions; keep them in the country. R and D funding in Australia is not available. Brain drain from Australia.

Kojinup community; growth rather than decline in the region.

Downshifting; the trend. Get out of your job and downshift. More people are doing this and creating more jobs for others.

Change the system: slow process. Use your energy to do what you can in your community.

Energetic working people for the good of all so we can all enjoy a share of the earth's resources.

### **Questions:**

#### **Any positive hope at the end of all this?**

Mary Jenkins: initiatives that come from the grass roots

Senator Siewert: increase in the number of people that want to get involved. We are at the tip over point- the community will start to say no more.

Lin Hatfield-Dodds: amendments made to legislation, running advocacy day in Canberra, reports that caucus was more aware of the impacts. Pick our issues, work together, optimistic and opportunistic.

Nola Kunnen: Talent and creativity is there. Question of resources is always a tricky one.

#### **Example of defunding of project**

Senator Siewert: will take case to Canberra

#### **Homeless man, welfare to work changes and breaches**

Lin Hatfield-Dodds: charitable organisations will pick up the slack. We will not be able to deliver services that people need. At a cross roads with the sector- need to get active.

#### **Ethical practices as a worker: we're all subject to funding agreements. Breaches your own views as a worker. What are the implications of having to do such work; ethical crisis?**

Lin Hatfield-Dodds: core identity, what are our values; what we will and won't do.

Eg- NGO's to breach people. Not saying we won't do it; rather we CAN'T do it.

Draw a line in the sand together.