



# New Australian Social Inclusion Board research reports

## Purpose

The Australian Social Inclusion Board has recently published three research reports:

- ‘Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage’ (2011)
- ‘Addressing Barriers for Jobless Families’ (2011)
- ‘Governance Models for Location Based Initiatives’ (2011)

This briefing provides a summary of the conclusions and key approaches suggested in each report. The full reports are available at:

[www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Pages/Resources.aspx#board](http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Pages/Resources.aspx#board)

## Background

The Australian Social Inclusion Board (the Board) was established in May 2008. It is the main advisory body to the Commonwealth Government on ways to achieve better outcomes for the most disadvantaged in our community and to improve social inclusion.

### Report 1: Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage

The method for the Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage study included stakeholder consultations, public submissions and qualitative research (in-depth interviews with 56 people from disadvantaged backgrounds). The Principal Policy Officer represented UnitingCare Burnside at the Sydney stakeholder consultation (held October 2010) and raised issues relating to school engagement and suspension. Burnside also provided a short submission which focused on the role of Newpin as an effective model of providing more intensive support for vulnerable parents and children.<sup>1</sup>

The Board identifies three key principles for addressing cycles of disadvantage:

- **the way you treat people matters** – it is not enough to focus on what support is provided, it matters how it is provided
- **continuity of support is essential** – episodic care based around discrete crises with a withdrawal of services in between is an inefficient and ineffective way to address entrenched disadvantage
- **a focus on addressing structural disadvantage must be maintained** – more work is needed to implement a holistic response to disadvantage that reduce the structural barriers that contribute to one disadvantage snowballing into others.

### *Early school leaving*

The report identifies early school leaving as a critical factor in determining a young person's future. However, the focus of suggested approaches is primarily on young people who have already disengaged from education and the need for alternative, flexible learning opportunities. There is no attention to the early and middle years of school or the need for multi-level approaches that include prevention and early intervention approaches.

### *Young people leaving care*

In its recommendations, the Board urges Commonwealth and State/Territory governments to do more to ensure that young people leaving state care receive an appropriate level of support to break the cycle of disadvantage.

The report cites economic research in Victoria on young people leaving out-of-home care which shows the high financial cost associated with inadequate support for children transitioning from care to independence.

## **Report 2: Addressing Barriers for Jobless Families**

This report considers the current employment services system, focusing in particular on Job Services Australia (JSA). The Board concludes that whilst JSA is more likely than previous employment services systems to achieve positive outcomes for jobless families, it is not providing the kinds of support that the most disadvantaged Australians need to break into the employment market.

The report notes that the majority of jobless families are headed by single mothers and 51% of all persistently jobless families (jobless for a period of three or more years) had a child aged six years or younger. The Board concludes that to be successful, any approach to improving the outcomes of jobless families must include mechanisms to support single mothers and their children to maintain and strengthen their support networks, to develop new skills and education, and, at the appropriate time, to transition from welfare to sustainable work (full or part time).

The report identifies four key elements of approaches that are needed to address social exclusion for jobless families:

- *Sustainability* – to achieve sustainable employment for jobless families there is a need to connect disadvantaged job seekers to quality jobs with advancement prospects, rather than casual, inappropriate, short term positions with no future prospects
- An *individualised* approach with the *flexibility* to meet the diverse and complex needs of those in jobless families
- *Incremental achievement* - providing parents in jobless families with alternatives and choices that are realistically achievable and attractive for them. For example, Project Match in the United States recognises that employment, training and education are not a good first step for some people, especially if they have failed in those environments before. Instead, for some disadvantaged job seekers other activities in which they are already involved as parents and community members, can be structured to support the acquisition of the basic skills needed for workforce success. These activities might include child-focused activities, volunteer/community service activities and self-improvement activities.
- *Accessibility* – one model for enhancing accessibility is through community-based outreach activities; another approach to improving accessibility for jobless families is through early intervention service providers such as playgroups. The report identifies that playgroups can

be particularly effective as a soft-entry point into other services and can also enhance families' connection to their community.

The Board also recommends that the Commonwealth and State Governments consolidate and increase child care subsidies in line with the recommendations of the Henry Review (child care subsidies should cover at least 90% of child care costs for low-income families). Further, in recognition of the role that high quality child care can play in supporting the development of disadvantaged children, the Henry Review recommended, and the Board supports, the Commonwealth Government subsidising the full cost of child care for children whose parents remain jobless.

### **Report 3: Governance Models for Location Based Initiatives**

One of the six social inclusion priorities for the Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda is to "*focus on the locations of greatest disadvantage by tailoring place-based approaches in partnership with the community*". This report provides advice to the Australian Government on governance models that work best for locational approaches to address disadvantage. The methodology included review of program evaluations of place-based initiatives in Australia and overseas and lessons relating to governance structures.

The report argues that the problem solving approach governments typically take is not well suited to addressing entrenched, multifaceted disadvantage found in these locations. While this standard approach may work well to address less complex problems, a community development focused approach may be more successful in addressing the most entrenched location-based disadvantage.

Based on research and consultation, the Board proposes that location-based initiatives should be based on five key elements:

1. A clear connection between economic and social policy and programs at a local level.
2. A framework for providing integration of effort across governments.
3. A level of devolution that allows significant and meaningful local involvement in determining the issues and solutions.
4. Capacity development at both local level and in government, without which greater community engagement or devolution of responsibility will be impossible.
5. Funding, measurement and accountability mechanisms that are designed to support the long term, whole-of-government and community aims for an initiative, rather than attempting to build an initiative around unsuitable measurement and accountability.

The Board recommends that the Commonwealth Government should seek agreement with state, territory and relevant local governments on:

- a shared list of priority locations, and a method for identifying such locations
- brokerage arrangements coordinating efforts of all levels of government, including nominating and empowering a single public servant to be responsible for leading the efforts of all levels of government.

### **Recommendations**

- Continue to monitor the work of the Social Inclusion Board and identify any opportunities for advocacy on issues relating to school engagement and suspension

- Continue to promote Newpin as a model that addresses barriers for jobless families and which is consistent with the approaches recommended by the Social Inclusion Board (for example, providing a soft-entry point and building community connections and skills)

### Further information

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### References

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<sup>1</sup> Other engagement with the Social Inclusion Board since its establishment has been submission of a policy paper, *Social Inclusion: Making a Difference for Children and Young People at Risk of Lifetime Disadvantage* in 2008, which received positive feedback from Board members, and visit by the then Minister, one of its Board members and the Secretariat to Newpin St Marys in March 2010.