

SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND POLICY INNOVATIONS BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA

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This is an unedited draft. If you cite this article/PP, please reference it as follows:

Pawar, M. (2014). Social challenges and policy innovations by social workers in Australia. Presented at the Social Innovation and Engagement, a conference at Washington University in St. Louis, April 6-8, 2014.

Outline

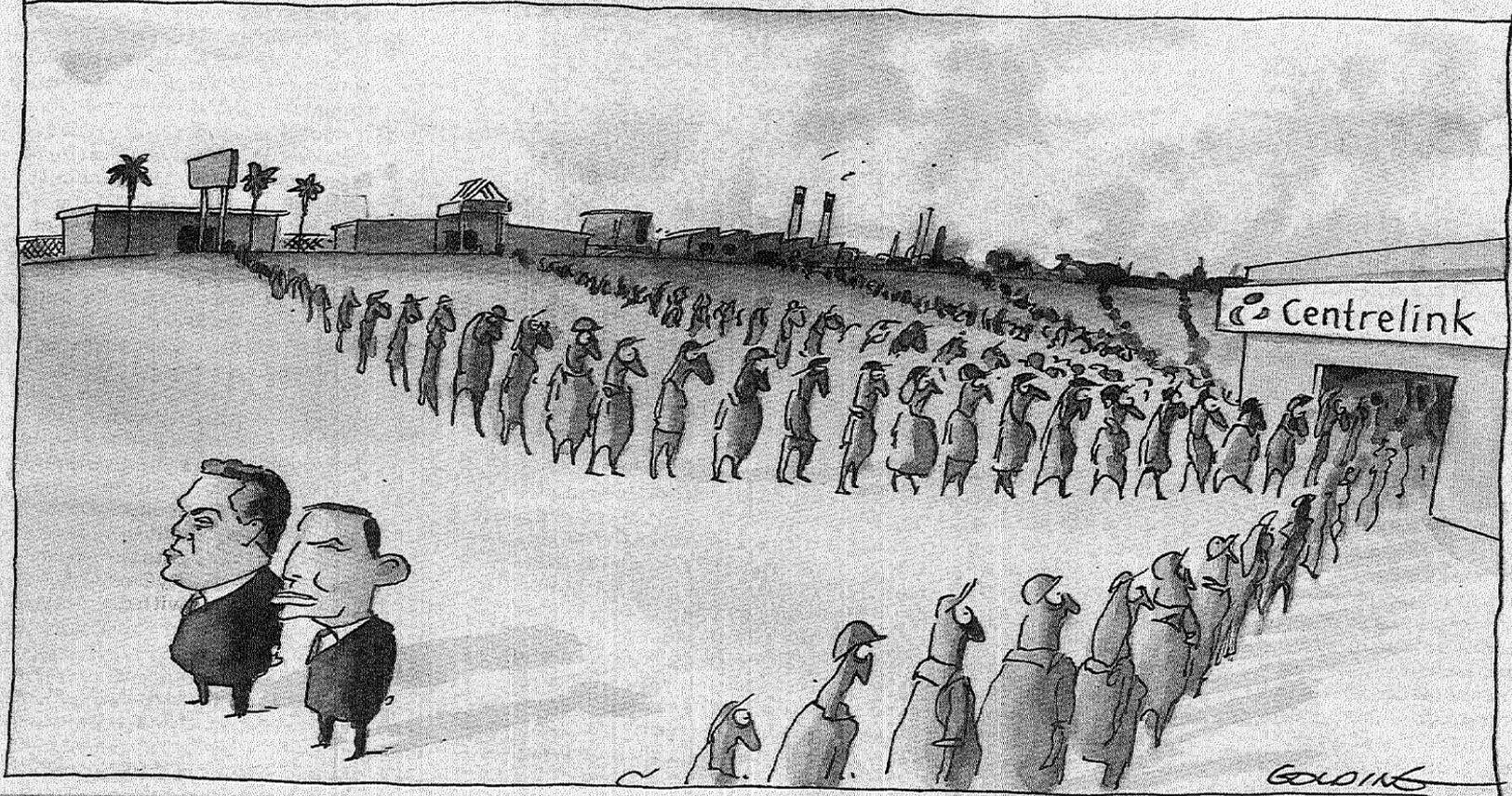
- Social challenges
- Concept of innovation
- Policy innovations: the issue; methods used; and outcome
- Lessons
- Suggestions

Social challenges

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Sunday Age 2 March 2014

THE CURRENT SPIRIT OF AUSTRALIA



Proposed job cuts

Industry	Qantas	Hold en	Toyota	Forge G	Alcoa	Sensis	WA hospitals	BHP Billiton & MA	Total
Job cuts	5000	2900	2500	1470	980	800	250	230	14130

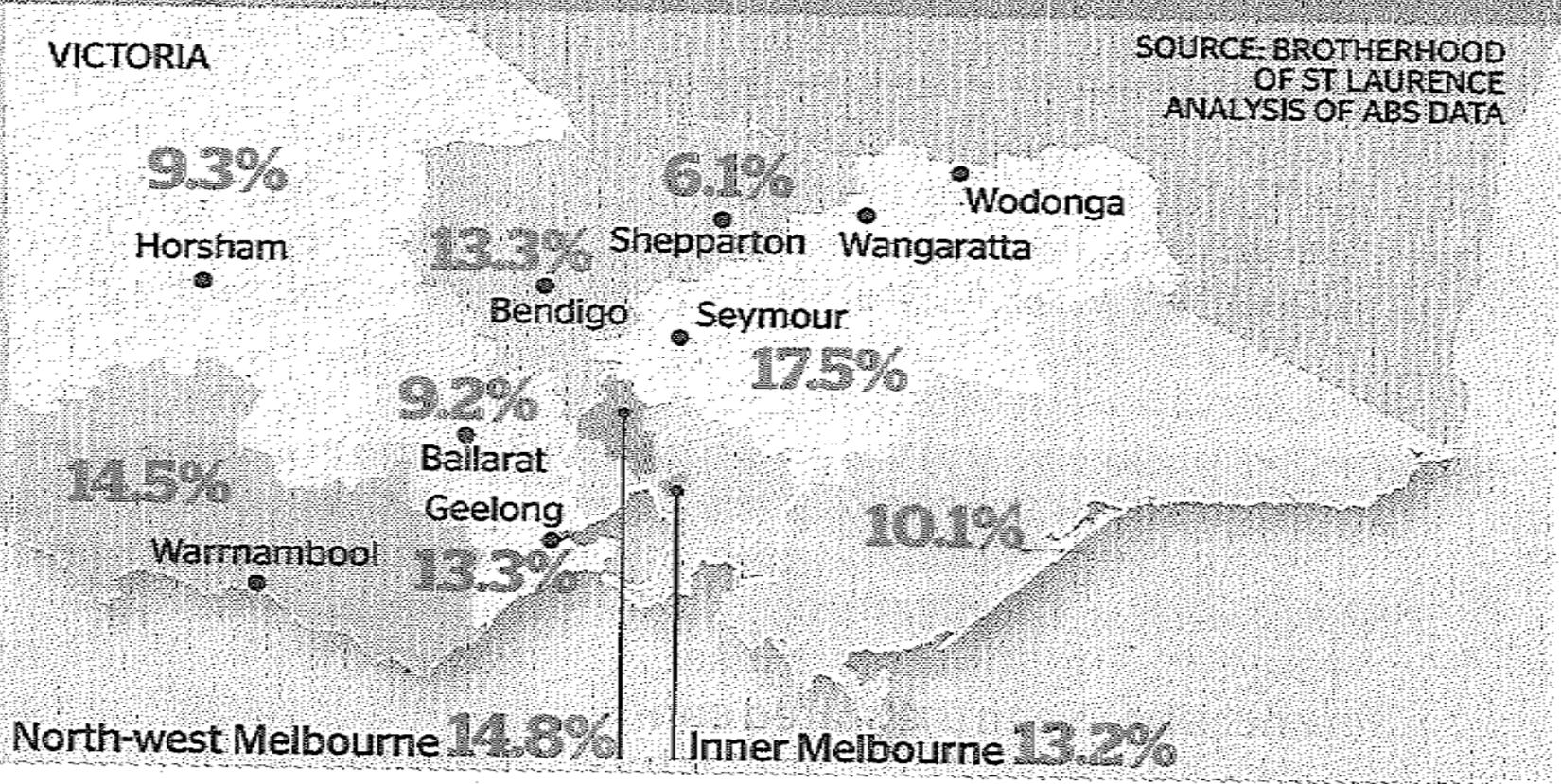
Out of work Regions hardest hit

Youth unemployment 'in crisis'

Young and jobless

VICTORIA

SOURCE: BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE ANALYSIS OF ABS DATA



Social challenges

- Market
- Inequality
- Poverty and unemployment
- Mental health
- Child sex abuse
- Conditions of Aboriginal people

- Threat to Medicare
- Human relationships
- Ageing population
- Socio-economic implications of demographic changes
- Global warming and climate change

Concept of social innovation

- More effective, efficient, sustainable or just
- New combination and/or new configuration of social practices
- New forms of governance and hierarchies

Concept of social innovation

- Not limited to new policy
- Amending and changing an existing policy
- Resisting and opposing certain policies
- Questioning and changing organizational policies and practices, or
- Lobbying to change policy decisions

Policy innovation by social workers

The enactment of the Australian Child Sex Tourism law

- Issue
 - Millions of children are sexually exploited
 - Violation of children's rights
 - No adequate policy or legal measure in Australia to take action against Australians who contributed to child trafficking and exploitation overseas

The enactment of the Australian Child Sex Tourism law

- Methods used to enact laws/policies
 - Exposure to the issue
 - Campaign overseas and in Australia
 - Establishing an organisation
 - Lobbying government to enact law
 - Raising awareness

- Use of media
- Writing to politicians
- Highlighting the solution
- Fund-raising
- Believing in oneself
- Sacrifice

Outcome

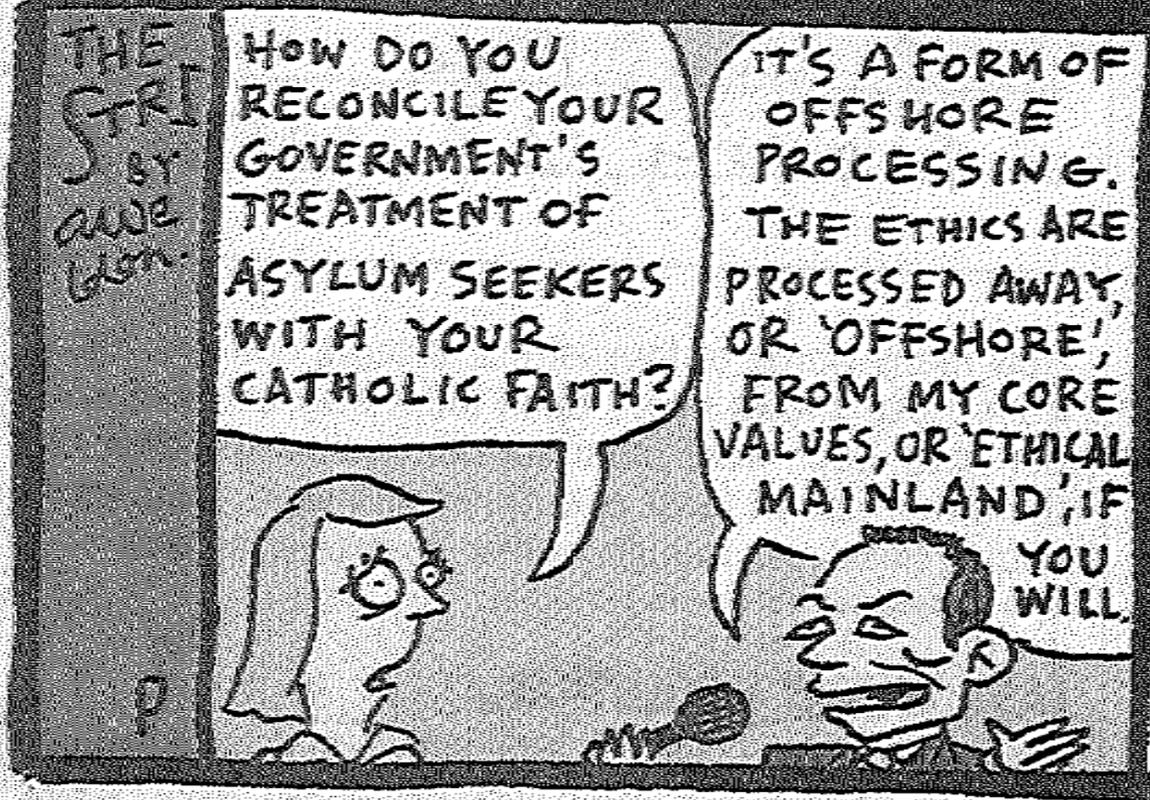
- Successful enactment of the Child Sex tourism Law in 1994
- Severe penalty (25 years imprisonment)
- Child friendly legal procedures
- Police support for law enforcement
- Police hotline to report
- Innovative educational programs
- Childwise tourism program
- Awards

Resistance to Australia's asylum seeker and refugee policy

THE STRIP

Andrew Weldon

THE SUNDAY AGE 23-2-14 P.18



The issue

- Human rights of asylum seekers are violated
- Mandatory detention
- Detention of children

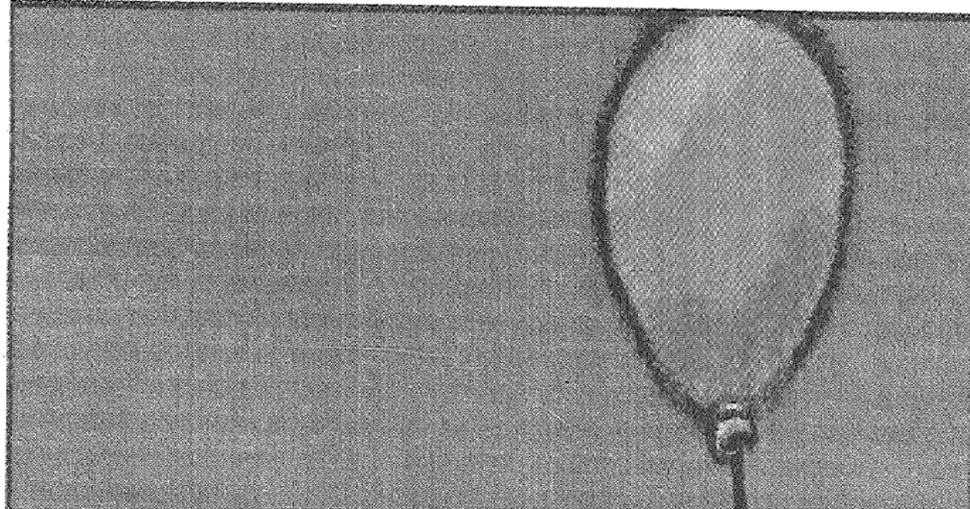
Methods used to resist and amend laws/policies

- Campaign to resist and change policy
- Citizen-driven people inquiry
- Media commentary
- Mobilisation of volunteers
- Discussion of the issue in several forums
- Creatively critiquing the asylum seeker policy

Australia trafficks the asylum seeker children

LINDA BRISKMAN
CHRIS GODDARD

In transporting imprisoned children over national borders, Canberra is not only involved in trafficking but also exposing them to more abuse.



of abuse, neglect, exploitation or harm to unaccompanied minors". A noble statement, but given the remote location, the tensions and children's past experiences, such a goal is not achievable.

In 1992, in his renowned Redfern speech, Paul Keating referred to indigenous stolen children and spoke of our failure to imagine such things happening to us. Ironically, it was Keating's government that introduced mandatory detention of asylum seekers. Our national cruelty continues as we fail to imagine what it would be like if our own

“In effect, the government is moving children for profit, exactly what they accuse people smugglers of doing. The profit is not only financial for the range of stakeholders, but unashamedly political. Those colluding with exploitation of children for political and financial gain include the government departments, ground and air transport personnel, private security companies and “humanitarian” organizations. In this tangled web, ritualized abuse of children is shrouded by the shrill, simplistic message of Stop the Boats, unconsciously punishing these children to deter others.

Our national cruelty continues as we fail to imagine what it would be like if our own children were harshly imprisoned without cause, without limit and without hope”.

Outcome

- Amendment of the Act
- Introduction of community detention
- Kept the issue alive
- Awareness of the issue in the community
- Gave voice to the voiceless
- Enhanced social workers' confidence
- Human Rights Commission's award
- Placed the firsthand accounts of detention on public record
- Enhancing the government's guilt

Innovative policy and procedural changes in organizations

The issue

- Urbo-centric resource allocation model was unsuitable in rural and remote areas
- Recruiting and retaining skilled staff in rural and remote areas

Methods used to change policies and procedures

- Developed defence for not addressing the issue of operating budget
- Linked the issue to inequity and unfairness
- Cost analysis to advocate for change
- Education about rural social work practice
- Inadequate resource allocation for training
- Pointing out in quarterly financial reviews

Methods used in regards to the recruiting issue

- Examination of current recruitment practices
- Modifying the job description
- Use of local media and Aboriginal radio
- Culturally relevant information package
- Engagement of local people/community
- Information day over barbeque lunch
- Pre-interview with panel members
- Culturally sensitive mentoring program

Outcome

- The resource allocation model was revised to meet the budgetary requirements of non-metropolitan, rural and remote areas
- The revised recruitment methods helped to appoint personnel at difficult-to-fill locations
- Individualised mentoring program helped staff members and generated positive feedback

**Restoring the government
Medicare rebate under the
'Better access to Mental Health
Care' program**

The issue

- The Government decision to withdraw Medicare rebate from social workers
- Potential impact on 1,100 mental health social workers
- 37% of service users lived in rural areas
- Half of the service users on low income would not be able to access the service
- Non-consultation

Methods used to change the policy decision and restore the program

- Mobilized people and organizations
- Use of news-makers or key figures
- Briefing journalists
- Informing about the issue to supporting organisations
- E-bulletin to members, including social networking methods
- Resources to write letters to MPs
- Providing questions for Senate Estimates Hearings

- Asking people to ring local members
- Seeking support from interests groups
- Media interviews, coverage in local media
- Meeting with the minister's staff on invitation
- Shared real cases and informed the public about the potential impact of the decision on service users
- The campaign involved over 1000 individual letters by AASW members to the minister
- A general practitioners' initiated petition with several thousand signatures
- Supportive speeches by ten MPs

Outcome

- The minister's office invited the AASW to discuss the issue
- The government agreed to provisionally defer the decision.
- On behalf of the minister, apologies were offered
- A seat was provided to the AASW on the steering committee for the *Better Access evaluation*

- Collaborative strategies with the minister's Department of Health and Ageing were developed
- 35 accredited mental health social workers informed the department about their skills, knowledge, experience and innovative practices under the *Better Access* program
- The AASW also gained a seat on the expert advisory committee of the Access to Allied Psychological Services
- The government completely reversed the original decision

- Committed to work with the AASW to provide high quality mental health care services
- Enhanced the confidence of the association and social workers as to what they can achieve
- Created positive impact on similar professional bodies.
- Concerned people were relieved that the services will be continued.

Lessons

- Critical life experiences have a significant role in policy innovation
- It is important to expose social workers to critical life conditions and suffering.
- It is important for social workers to critically reflect on their own life experiences
- Social workers' personal and professional commitment to certain qualities and values have a crucial role in policy innovation

- Some element of sacrifice on the part of policy innovators
- Professional training needs to focus on the above two points
- Appropriate non-conformation is a necessity for policy innovation
- All problem posing is accompanied by effective solutions
- Thus issue making must be accompanied by some innovative solutions

- Knowledge and skills of policy analysis, collaboration, mobilization of people and resources, coordination, appropriate use of the media, communication, negotiation or discussion with persons of power, often politicians although in case 3 it was bureaucrats
- ICT is an important tool, which can be effectively used to achieve policy innovation
- Social policy innovations are possible and social workers can achieve them

Suggestions

- More research, analysis and dissemination of policy innovations by social workers at all levels is needed
- As policy practice is a necessary foundation for policy innovation, social workers need to engage in policy practice
- Social workers with power and authority have the potential to contribute to policy innovation.
- Inequality and poverty- policy innovation

Suggestions

- Four important social processes
 1. Sustainability of the current social protection system
 2. Growing ageing population
 3. Global warming and climate change
 4. Interface with ICT and influence on human relationships
- These processes offer scope for policy innovation

Conclusion

- Culture of social work
- Innovation is important and we all must strive to achieve it

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Thank you

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