

DONDUNSTAN**FOUNDATION** FOR A BETTER FUTURE



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Commissioner for Social Inclusion

***Six Years On: A Review of South
Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative***

Address to the Don Dunstan Foundation, Adelaide

Monday, 21 April 2008



Government
of South Australia

Mr Premier. Professor Fran Baum. Margaret Wallace, Professor Michael Barber and members of the Don Dunstan Foundation. Ladies and Gentlemen.

As the Premier mentioned we have arrived back from the Australia 2020 Summit with a real sense of hope and optimism in Australia's future. In particular, the Summit's recommendation that a National Social Inclusion Action Plan be developed will have a huge impact on the social structure of Australia and lead to major achievements in engaging disadvantaged people with their society. And with the Rudd Government's already announced decision that they will develop their social inclusion strategy based on the South Australian model places us here in South Australia squarely in the centre of the national agenda.

I was delighted to have the opportunity for a conversation with Prime Minister Rudd during the 2020 Summit. He wanted to know about our Social Inclusion work here in South Australia, particularly our work to tackle rough sleeper homelessness. As a result of that conversation, Social Inclusion here in SA has been asked to write a "how to" case study to become part of the forthcoming Green Paper on Homelessness, on how SA is achieving significant results in reducing rough sleeper homelessness particularly in the inner city of Adelaide.

The achievements outlined by the Premier, the Hon Mike Rann, this morning demonstrate that, that which began as the "Social Inclusion experiment" in 2002, has become the bedrock of South Australia's approach to delivering public value to the most marginalised through joined-up responses.

During the Dunstan era we led the nation in social policy innovation, but I believe that it is only subsequently that we fully honoured this leadership.

We have a great deal to offer the nation. Our Social Inclusion work and the unique method we have developed is a part of that offering.

In terms of structure, the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative consists of:

- The Social Inclusion Board which provide social policy advice to the Premier in response to specific references;
- A Commissioner for Social Inclusion whose primary role is to monitor implementation of the Social Inclusion agenda approved by Cabinet;
- And, a high-level social inclusion policy unit within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, which supports the Board and Commissioner and reports to me on a daily basis.

This unique structure provides the South Australian Government with external independent advice while also drawing on the public sector's best social policy skills. This is combined with the finest expertise from the academic, private and not-for-profit sectors from South Australia and nationally.

In terms of approach, South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative is about rapid change, with constant monitoring and evaluation.

Our approach to this task is based on a view that the causes of social exclusion are multiple and interrelated, and that economic factors are linked to them. Social inclusion and social justice are, therefore, not seen as additions to the often dominant endeavours of economic development and growth.

In our work for social inclusion, we begin with a bias towards interconnectedness of problems, their causes and their solutions.

This naturally brings us to the conclusion that joined-up problems demand joined-up solutions. This fundamental belief has become the dominant theme and driving motive for the Social Inclusion Board. Meaningful change that has an impact for the most marginalised members of our community can only be achieved through joined-up responses that are directed to the creation of public value. And this joined-up approach must bring together not only the public sector, but also the private and not-for-profit sectors, working across organisational boundaries towards this common goal of creating public value.

It is interesting to note that as we began our work on Social Inclusion in 2002 we made a deliberate decision not to be preoccupied with a definition of Social Inclusion. That has proved to be a very good decision. It allowed for very fluid debate to continue as we developed. It has resulted in an emphasis around key words: PARTICIPTION – OPPORTUNITY – CAPABILITIES – living out HUMAN DIGNITY.

In implementing this joined-up method, the Social Inclusion Initiative has been through three stages or generations of work.

The first generation of activity focused policy advice to government on defined social problems:

- What needs to be done to increase the number of young people completing Year 12 or a vocational equivalent;
- How to halve the number of people sleeping rough; and
- What can we do to address inequity, disadvantage and racism experienced by Aboriginal people.

The Social Inclusion Board has demanded the delivery of benefit to Aboriginal people from every program and initiative we have recommended and sponsored. One Social Inclusion Program that epitomises this commitment is the South Australian Aboriginal Sports Training Academy. Last year, in its third year of operation, five young people from the Academy completed the South Australian Certificate of Education. This is the largest number of Aboriginal young people achieving their SACE at any single educational institution in South Australia. This makes me incredibly proud of the achievements of the Academy.

The focus of the second generation of work by the Social Inclusion Initiative was on policy advice to government on how to address social problems through systems change. Our work in preparing a reform agenda for South Australia's mental health system and proposing a new approach to addressing youth offending stand out in this regard.

We have now embarked on our third generation of work. The focus is on addressing, in the words of Tony Blair, “deep exclusion”. It is about providing flexible and personalised responses to those members of our community experiencing economic disadvantage to change their circumstances. As such, it is about ensuring a social dividend from projected continuing economic growth that lies ahead, especially from growth and expansion in the mining sector.

With each of these generations of work we have applied a method of which we initially drew heavily on the experience of the UK Social Exclusion Unit. Over time we have honed it into a uniquely South Australian “**Social Inclusion Method**” that has facilitated wide involvement and gained credibility across a spectrum of interest groups.

We are now in a position to present ourselves as a template for others. And as I have already noted, this has been recognised by the Rudd Government. Equally gratifying was the earlier decision by the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, to examine the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative as a case study. This occurred in the context of critically reviewing existing policy and actions aiming to address social exclusion. Professor Baum will talk more about this shortly.

I would like to say that process of working with Professor Baum and her colleagues has been extraordinarily valuable in helping the Social Inclusion Board and Unit to understand and appreciate the unique method that we have. In holding a mirror up to us they have given the Social Inclusion Initiative the insights needed to take us to our third generation of work. This kind of collaboration with the research sector is squarely on our agenda as we move into the next phase of our work.

In thinking about the insights from the WHO study, I believe the essential elements of the South Australian Social Inclusion method include:

- a critical mindset – not accepting the usual explanations often given by the bureaucracy and advocates in the first instance;
- collecting an evidence base – having the persistence and creativity to find the hidden and forgotten details;
- linking social and economic policy – and avoiding the thinly veiled hostility towards the market economy and competition that affects the rhetoric of some social policy dialogue;
- engagement of affected populations – honouring the voices of those we are seeking to include apart from the voices of those who provide services to them and advocate on behalf of them;
- being independent of Government while embedded within the apparatus of government; and
- building relationships – that are able to deliver innovative, joined-up responses.

The WHO study has also reinforced to us the importance of remaining committed to meaningful engagement with communities of interest, and to developing fresh ways of engaging.

A common formula for the process of public policy development in Australia is to first conduct consultations and set up committees. Extensive energy and resources usually go into these processes, but often for minimal returns to either policy makers or participants, beyond increasing

cynicism as witnessed by comments such as, “not another consultation” or “we have already told you what we think about this issue”.

In the area of social policy development, participation in consultations has tended to be dominated by service providers who are treated as the advocates for or intermediaries of affected communities. From the participants’ perspectives, these consultations are experienced as one-off affairs increasingly disconnected from the policy outcomes. From the policy makers’ point of view, consultation outputs seem to be bound by past experience, dominant ways of thinking and vested interests, and therefore rarely adequately assists in defining or defining the problem and the ideas presented for moving forward are often limited and with a tendency to err for more of the same.

With a real commitment to community engagement and participation in policy making, this situation presented the Social Inclusion Initiative with three challenges.

First, to find ways to ensure consultations involved as broad a cross section of interested parties as possible, but especially including disadvantaged and marginalised populations and communities. Second, to stimulate different ways of thinking about both the problem and practice so as to lead to the innovative solutions needed.

And third, to ensure that participants in Social Inclusion consultations experienced them as true involvement in the policy making process, rather than some cynical exercise in public relations. The emergence of an “active listening” approach to consultation has been vital for the Social Inclusion Board to overcome these challenges. Active listening is an open-minded consultation process that moves beyond identifying the problem to actively seeking solutions from interested parties. This process legitimises the knowledge base held by stakeholders and encourages them to take greater ownership and participate more vigorously in the policy development process. Continuing the consultation throughout the policy development process further enhances this. Central to this active listening process being effective is conducting it as an educative and consensus building exercise, ensuring the consultation keeps moving forward to cover new ground, rather than repeatedly addressing the same issues. That is, joining up the diverse information about the problem and its solution and communicating it effectively to interested parties.

The benefit of the active listening approach is that the policy advice delivered to Government by the Social Inclusion Board is more likely to be accepted by stakeholders. Their engagement throughout the policy development process gives stakeholders greater insight into the logic behind the Board’s approach to the issue. Seeing their input and ideas reflected in the policy that is developed encourages greater ownership and prolonged engagement, which is especially important in the implementation of innovative approaches to addressing social issues. Clearly a preparedness to evolve drives the Social Inclusion Initiative, and is essential, alongside persistence.

This persistence has started with the **personal and political commitment of the Premier**. And flows across the Initiative. I cannot overstate the importance of the ongoing dedication of our head of government to the work of building a more inclusive society.

I believe our experiences in South Australia have a great deal to offer to future thinking about how to combat social exclusion through joined-up policy responses. I look forward to the vigorous national debate on social inclusion as an approach that will flow from Prime Minister Rudd's policy commitment. And, in this context, look forward to hearing more of Fran Baum's insights into what we have achieved so far and how we might continue to build on it into the future.

Thank you.

(Address ends)