

DONDUNSTAN**FOUNDATION** **FOR A BETTER FUTURE**



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Minister for Economic Development

Minister for Social Inclusion

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

Speech to the Don Dunstan Foundation, Adelaide

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**Government
of South Australia**

I acknowledge that we meet on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people, and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

It's a great pleasure to be here as a guest of the Don Dunstan Foundation, to not only honour Don's legacy but to speak about an area that helped define his political vision and to which he made such a profound and enduring contribution.

For me, of course, there is a personal as well as a public policy edge to what we are doing today.

It was one of the great privileges of my life to work for Don Dunstan in the late 1970s as his speechwriter and press secretary.

For me, he was not only an inspiration as Australia's most reformist Premier, but also a most supportive mentor and friend.

When I was growing up, the accepted wisdom for dealing with social welfare issues was to throw money at problems without tackling their underlying causes.

Sadly, this approach often served only to trap families in an enduring cycle of disadvantage rather than provide them with meaningful opportunities to break out.

But when I moved to South Australia from New Zealand in 1977, first of all to work in Don Dunstan's Industrial Democracy unit, I was struck by the different approach to social welfare being practiced here.

Under Dunstan, this State became a social incubator where the concepts of equal opportunity and multiculturalism first gained expression in Australia through both legislation and a range of innovative programs.

Many South Australians have forgotten that, in addition to being a reformist Premier, Don was South Australia's first Minister for Social Welfare from 1965 to 1967.

At the same time, he also served as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, which was another first for the State.

Don Dunstan and his Government championed Aboriginal land rights, with the Aboriginal Lands Trust Legislation being passed as early as 1967 to become Australia's first Land Rights Act.

Other innovations of that era included ground-breaking equal opportunities laws, consumer protection measures, and a completely different approach to town planning that protected and enhanced our city and made it more liveable than any other in Australia.

Plus, of course, there was the visionary commitment to the environment.

Even as recently as at the 2020 Summit that I attended in Canberra over the weekend, people were discussing the need for a national container deposit scheme, - not a new idea, but a good idea - 31 years after it came into effect in South Australia.

I'll speak more about that summit shortly.

But these, and many other reforms, made South Australia the talk of the nation in the 1970s; they helped give our State a national voice that far outweighed our size, and lifted us from rock bottom to Australian pre-eminence.

The State's landmark Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 was the first legislation of its kind in Australia, as was our decriminalisation of homosexuality.

The Dunstan Government became the first in the nation to set up a Women's Advisor's office, and the fact that it was established within the Premier's Department underscored its clout.

And the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act introduced by Don Dunstan recognised the inalienable rights of indigenous people to their vast, traditional homelands, years ahead of Mabo.

More than 25 per cent of our State is now under inalienable indigenous title.

In presenting the 1976 Ben Chifley Memorial Lecture on the theme of Social Democracy, Don said: "What we are out to do is to see that every citizen in society has the social, economic, educational, cultural and recreational wherewithal to enjoy life and draw the most personal satisfaction from it".

The Dunstan era set a high water mark for social innovation in Australia.

It certainly shaped my philosophy and, I'm sure, that of many people at this morning's forum.

But Don Dunstan's legacy, for me, is about his insistent plea for us to look forward, not back.

He would not want me, as Premier, to look back and embrace schemes borrowed from the 1970s, let alone romanticise his legacy.

Don was about innovation in social policy, which is the reason why I established South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative within days of my Government being elected in 2002.

Before I update you on the Initiative's achievements over the past six years, can I say that I'm delighted that the weekend's 2020 Summit resolved to make social inclusion a national priority with an Australia-wide action plan on social inclusion to combat poverty.

It will be developed in consultation with the community and incorporate evidence-based goals as well as measurable targets.

The plan will incorporate economic, social and environmental measures with progress to be reported each year in the Federal Budget papers.

While I'm speaking about the weekend's summit, I was absolutely delighted that so many delegates from other states highlighted the fact that South Australia is the leader on Social Inclusion initiatives in this country, as it is in the areas of climate change and early childhood programs.

That includes the "Every Chance for Every Child" program that sees home visits by specialist nurses to every newborn child and their mothers.

To briefly explain how the Social Inclusion Initiative came about, I was at a dinner here in Adelaide in 1998 with the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, who told me about British Prime Minister Tony Blair's innovative approach to tackling social disadvantage.

The only problem that the Archbishop had with the Blair Government's *Social Exclusion Initiative* was its name.

He felt that it should reflect inclusion, rather than exclusion.

When I became Premier four years later, one of the first phone calls I made was to Monsignor David Cappo, the Catholic Vicar-General in Adelaide.

David boasted strong national credentials in social policy and had a reputation as being caring but tough.

He was the person I wanted to head up my Social Inclusion Initiative, and I would like to pay tribute to him for the great work he's done in driving reform over the past six years.

I have described David as "admirably impatient" in his desire to achieve change and to ensure that our departments aren't operating independently of one another as "silos".

His appointment has ruffled some feathers.

Like Don, he has been verbally attacked, sometimes in the most sectarian and prejudiced ways, by people who should know better.

But David – like Don – knows that you need to be bold in order to get things done.

When David and I travelled to London to meet with Tony Blair and his social inclusion experts in 2002, we were warned that some departments might pay lip service to the concept but then simply re-badge what they were already doing in order to win budget bids.

That's why I've given David Cappo a mandate for action that goes well beyond an advisory role.

He chairs the Social Inclusion Board, which has my authority to intervene and confront issues at the highest level as well as tackle excessive bureaucracy in order to lead the reform process.

Don Dunstan regularly warned about the perils of becoming entangled in red tape.

He said: "Overblown bureaucracy can be one of the most pernicious manifestations of modern Western Society.

"I have seen, in my time, some cases that make Kafka look more like a Hansard reporter than a novelist".

It was important that the Social Inclusion Board was made up of innovative thinkers, and wasn't captured by interest groups.

That was absolutely crucial.

I wanted people's ideas born from experience rather than have them act as delegates, or representatives of organisations.

It was equally important that Social Inclusion be located at the centre of government – at its heart – reporting directly to the Premier so that it could be marginalised or sidelined.

There have been times when David Cappo's been frustrated, when he's come up against road blocks from people who have felt threatened by change.

But I believe the key to moving ahead is breaking down the "silo" approach and getting government and non-government agencies to work together.

By doing so, they can address complex issues that are inter-related, and confront problems where a simplistic approach of treating only symptoms rather than causes would do nobody any good.

One of those complex problems is homelessness.

Among the first references my Government gave to the Social Inclusion Board was a target to halve the number of “rough sleepers” in our community.

Some people argued that this was an issue for the Housing Department.

But homelessness isn't just about the availability of houses.

It's more about substance abuse, mental illness, family breakdown and generational poverty.

In June 2003, the Social Inclusion Board presented the State Government with a 14-point plan to reduce and prevent rough sleeping.

One of the programs established from that blueprint was to ensure that homeless people who presented at Emergency Departments weren't released back on to the street without support.

Now, any rough sleepers who seek medical help are also connected to housing, mental health, drug and alcohol support programs to help them escape from the revolving door of sleeping rough.

I'm encouraged that, according to ABS Census figures for the period 2001 to 2006, we are the only Australian state where the rate of people sleeping rough went down rather than up.

The “Street to Home” program that was established in 2004 has assisted 108 homeless people into long-term accommodation.

That includes 42 of the city's most chronic rough sleepers.

They are people who had been sleeping rough for three years or more - indeed, some had been sleeping rough for between nine and 20 years and were previously considered “too hard to house”.

As at December 2007, a total of 16,435 people had been assisted in some way by the Social Inclusion Initiative's Homelessness Reference.

And Social Inclusion programs have helped prevent 2,000 people at risk of homelessness from ending up on the street.

Another important initiative to address homelessness arose out of the State Government's Thinkers in Residence program.

David Cappo was instrumental in getting Rosanne Haggerty - an expert in tackling homelessness from New York City - to come here and help us establish Common Ground Adelaide.

Common Ground is the largest developer of supportive housing in the United States, and provides well-designed apartments with on-site support for low income and previously homeless people.

With the strong support of local businesses, we recently opened our first building with 38 units above the new Franklin Street bus station.

A second inner-city building with 60 units is due to be opened by the end of this year.

But Common Ground is not just about providing a roof.

It's about making sure that the factors that contributed to these people's homelessness are addressed and that they have ongoing on-site support to make a success of their tenancy.

I'm delighted that the Premier of Tasmania Paul Lennon, following discussions with David Cappo and Rosanne Haggerty, is setting up Common Ground in his State.

I'm also delighted that Therese Rein, the wife of our Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, has accepted the role of national patron for Common Ground Australia, having visited its operations in New York during the Prime Minister's recent trip to the United States.

The Social Inclusion Initiative was also charged with the task of lifting South Australia's school retention rates.

This State had gone from leading the nation in school retention rates in the 1990s to being one of the lowest-achieving jurisdictions by 2001.

That's now being turned around.

In six years, we have legislated twice to increase the school leaving age.

And in January 2004, I launched Social Inclusion's School Retention Action Plan to which the Government committed \$28.4 million over four years.

That plan has already supported more than 15,000 young South Australians and helped them engage, re-engage or continue with learning so that they successfully complete Year 12 or its vocational equivalent.

For the 2005 school year, retention rates for Years 10 to 12 students reached about 71 per cent and remained steady, which is the best result in almost a decade.

In addition, through the Innovative Community Action Network, or ICAN program as it's known, 82 per cent of participants became re-engaged in learning or employment pathways.

These are mostly young people who had histories of poor school attendance or had disengaged totally from learning and otherwise would have dropped out.

In November last year, the Social Inclusion Board presented the Government with its plan to radically overhaul the State's mental health services.

We agreed to all 41 of the recommendations made in the report, and have committed \$93.5 million over the next four years to the biggest-ever reform of mental health in South Australia.

A key finding of the Social Inclusion Board was that the stress being placed on the State's mental health system is not directly attributable to the volume of people using it.

Rather, it's the complex needs of a small number of people who repeatedly present to public mental health services.

It's the same issue that's confronting mental health services across the developed world.

As a result, the Government will implement a "stepped model" of care that's designed to reduce the instances of mental health patients being recycled through the system.

The plan will provide for targeted responses to an estimated 800 high-need clients.

A key component of the overhaul is the \$100 million-plus redevelopment of the Glenside hospital site as a centre for specialist mental health services, which will include a new 129-bed hospital as well as intermediate and supported community accommodation.

The Social Inclusion Initiative ensures that Aboriginal people are considered in all of its references.

However, specific work has been done, and will continue to be done, to improve Aboriginal health outcomes.

Among the ways that's being achieved is through a focus on sport, recreation and the arts.

The Social Inclusion Board has also established a South Australian Aboriginal Sports Training Academy.

The Academy's innovative sports-based curriculum has successfully increased the number of young Aboriginal people who complete their secondary school education.

As a result of its success, the program has been expanded to include the John Pirie Secondary School in Port Pirie, and will also be launched in Ceduna in the very near future.

Soon after being elected in 2002, the State Government charged the Social Inclusion Initiative with organising a Drugs Summit, which involved more than 200 community leaders over three days of deliberations.

The Summit led to 34 initiatives being developed that were based around building resilience in young people through education, and saving lives through timely intervention.

Program evaluation of the Drugs Summit has shown it was a highly worthwhile investment, with heroin overdose projects leading to an 80 per cent decrease in the number of heroin-related deaths being reported and more than 120 clandestine amphetamine laboratories being shut down by police since 2003.

In February 2007, I asked David Cappelletto to provide advice on youth offending, with a specific brief to focus on a group of young people identified through South Australia Police's Operation Mandrake.

He delivered his report last June, and it outlined a framework to address serious repeat offending by young people.

As a result, all Operation Mandrake youths who have been convicted have also been assessed and now have a case management plan.

And amendments have been made to the Young Offenders Act to ensure the judiciary takes greater account of community safety when sentencing.

In line with David Cappelletto's "Breaking the Cycle" report on youth offending, greater engagement in recreation, sport and the arts is being encouraged for young offenders.

As you can see, the Social Inclusion Board has been active and decisive in attacking the causes of social disadvantage.

We have expanded David Cappelletto's role, appointing him as Commissioner for Social Inclusion who reports directly to me, and has access across the Government.

I also attracted some criticism by appointing him, along with leading businessman Robert Champion de Crespigny to sit in on meetings of the State's powerful Executive Committee of Cabinet that includes myself, the Deputy Premier (and Treasurer), the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Energy, and the Minister for Education.

The Committee is charged with aligning initiatives to the goals outlined in *South Australia's Strategic Plan*.

In a sector that is too often dominated by jargon, the only outcomes we are interested in are measurable results.

And in keeping with *South Australia's Strategic Plan* that sets out 98 targets, including a number related directly to social inclusion, we must continually set the bar higher.

That's why the new reference I've given to the Social Inclusion Board for 2008 represents possibly its toughest assignment so far.

I've asked the Board to ensure South Australians receive a social benefit from the expansion in mining, defence and advanced manufacturing.

The State is set to experience a massive economic dividend, and we need to work to make sure there's a social dividend as well.

I'm asking David Cappo and his team to work on ensuring that the most marginalised people - those with disabilities, Aborigines, people from jobless households, and those in regional and remote communities get a slice of the action.

We want to use the benefits flowing from the boom to re-engage the disadvantaged, not just those who are on the edges of participation, but also those who have been deeply and persistently excluded.

And we will be working closely with the new Federal Government, which has already announced it will base its social inclusion strategy on the South Australian model, to ensure that Commonwealth and State policies in this crucial area are well aligned.

Indeed, on Saturday at the 2020 Summit in Canberra, David Cappo and I met with the Prime Minister to discuss our Social Inclusion Initiative as well as the Common Ground program.

Ladies and gentlemen

The term social inclusion covers a myriad of people and programs.

It's about intervening more directly to stop homeless people ending up back on the street.

It's about helping people with mental illness to access the support they need.

It's about encouraging young people to stay in education and training, and to gain jobs rather than drop out.

And it's about partnerships rather than a “government knows best” approach.

As Don Dunstan said: “If a person is to play a full part in the life of the community, a premium must be placed on the provision of secure and stable employment, income, housing, health, hospitals, education, protection from exploitation and oppression, access to justice and the general freedom of self expression”.

This State boasts a proud history of social justice initiatives and progressive policy making.

So we owe this strong, new commitment to social inclusion as much to our past as we do the people of South Australia's future.

Thank you

(Speech ends)