

ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

QUARTERLY

NOVEMBER 2016



Analysis, news, and stories from Anti-Poverty Network SA, a grassroots community group fighting for the rights, needs, and dignity of welfare recipients, and other low-income people.



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INTRODUCTION

What a conference!! If you were fortunate enough to attend our Anti-Poverty Week conference, *Power To The Poor – Silent No More*, we hope you would agree that the conversations and speakers were inspiring and stimulating. It was terrific to have so many low-income people attending and speaking, particularly those who spoke in public for the first time.

It was the only Anti-Poverty Week event organised by low-income people. Many thanks to everyone who helped promote the event, who spoke, who helped set up, who helped pack up, who helped with catering, who helped with transport, and who helped in all sorts of other ways.

This newsletter features plenty of content from the conference. There is also a strong focus on job agencies: a serious piece from Byron, and a more tongue-in-cheek piece from Jade – both are quite insightful.

We hope the articles and stories in this newsletter inform, provoke, challenge, and inspire you.

Pas Forgione, Jade Manson, and Evelyn Konstantinidis

Pas Forgione, Jade Manson, Evelyn Konstantinidis, Kathy Bost, and Fleur Elland.

TO DONATE

Anti-Poverty Network SA is a small but growing group of volunteers with minimal income and resources. If you are able to donate, that would be much appreciated.

Account Name: Anti-Poverty Network SA

BSB: 805022

Account Number: 03627255

GETTING INVOLVED

CENTRAL BRANCH: Meets on first Saturday of the every month (except January) at 2pm at Activist Centre, Room 208, Level 2, 95 Currie Street, Adelaide

NORTHERN SUBURBS BRANCH: Meets on fourth Saturday of every month (except December) at 1:30pm at Twelve25 Youth Centre, 17 Wiltshire Street, Salisbury

NORTHWESTERN SUBURBS BRANCH: Meets on second Tuesday of every month (except December) at 2pm at Maritime Union, 65 St. Vincent Street, Port Adelaide.

FOOD FOR THE COMMUNITY INCORPORATED

Food for the Community Incorporated is a small community-based charity set up to help alleviate the stress caused by food shortage. We offer free fresh fruit and vegetables, bread and bread products, and assorted pantry items. We have a hamper delivery service, which we offer once per week at this stage. If you have any inquiries, please use our contact feature on our website, or message us through our Facebook page.



WEBSITE: www.ffcinc.wix.com/foodforthecommunity
E-MAIL: ffcinc@gmail.com
FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/ffcinc](https://www.facebook.com/ffcinc)

HOPE'S CAFE

Everyone is welcome at Hope's Cafe, at the corner of Portrush Road and Norwood Parade. We provide healthy and delicious meals on a 'pay what you can afford' basis. Hope's Cafe is a place where people who need help and people who want to help can come together as equals in a relaxed casual setting to socialise, work on projects, learn new skills and help build a supportive community. Our community is a vibrant mix of ages, cultures, and backgrounds, so it is never boring.



HOPE'S CAFE IS OPEN BETWEEN 10 AM- 3 PM
ON WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY

- Healthy delicious meals on a donate what you can afford basis
- Six levels of English classes for Iranian, Korean and Afghani students
- Assistance for asylum seekers with the preliminary stages of applications for asylum
- Welfare Rights Outreach Service on Fridays
- Guitar lessons
- Barista training
- Art and Craft activities
- Persian Cooking classes
- Fundraisers and Cultural events

UNITING
COMMUNITIES

Hope'sCafé located at Clayton Wesley Church with their 'Spire Garden' and 'Goodies Op Shop' Corner of The Parade & Portrush Road 83313529.



CLAYTON WESLEY
UNITING CHURCH



POWER TO THE POOR – A CONFERENCE TO REMEMBER | PAS FORGIONE

Low-income people, community workers, and members of the public gathered at Clayton Wesley Uniting Church, Beulah Park, on Friday October 21st and Saturday October 22nd, for Power To The Poor – Silent No More.



This conference, part of this year's Anti-Poverty Week, highlighted the experiences of welfare recipients – dealing with unemployment, poverty, and punitive government policy – and explored opportunities for fighting back.

The event, attracting 100 attendees on day one, and 70 on day two, was organised by Anti-Poverty Network SA, a grass-roots group of low-income people receiving government payments, including job-seekers, sole parents, carers, students, and Age and Disability Pensioners.

Workshops at the conference – on the rights of Disability Pensioners; mental health; unemployment; Work For The Dole; homelessness; job agencies; sole parents; climate change and poverty; dealing with

Centrelink when suffering from chronic/episodic health issues – reflected a recurring theme: with us, not to us. Welfare recipients have every right to be part of debates about the policies that impact their lives – and their first-hand knowledge and insights should not only be listened to, but should guide debates.

The opening session, 'Stories From Below The Poverty-Line', featured first-time speakers from Anti-Poverty Network SA speaking movingly about their struggles. Tracey, an older unemployed person, spoke about the judgemental, unhelpful remarks she has received, from time to time, from family and friends ('you're intelligent, why can't you get a job?') and community workers ('how is it you can afford to feed your cats, and not pay

your power bill?'; 'you must spend plenty of time sleeping in front of the TV'). She spoke about having to skip breakfast every day.

Wendy, another older unemployed person, spoke about how quickly her situation unravelled: when the company she worked for shut down and she was made redundant, she went from being in a relatively well-paid, high-skilled, technical job to being unemployed, to being evicted, to a long bout of homelessness – one of a growing class of older homeless woman – to a long bout (several months) when, to make ends meet, she had to go without power (including for much of summer and winter).



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Heather, a transwoman, spoke about the harassment she has repeatedly received from her job agency, their consistent misgendering of her – despite multiple attempts by her to correct them.

Others spoke about the isolation of being on income support – the limited mobility, being unable to spend as much time with family and friends, and engaged in community activities, as they would like – and the health issues they neglect due to lack of funds, like dental work. But there were also tales of resilience, and of the comfort that comes from being part of a supportive, non-judgmental community of low-income people – like that offered by Anti-Poverty Network SA.

Another recurring theme of the conference was the desperate need to redefine poverty and unemployment as the product of structural and policy factors, rather than individual flaws and weaknesses – as governments and the media routinely imply.

Owen Bennett, president of the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union, an organisation run by and for job-seekers, noted at the conference that the ratio of job vacancies to job-seekers has stretched out to an abysmal 1:19. According to the Department of Employment, 167,000 job vacancies – and 713,300 unemployed people, 1,100,100 underemployed people, and a further of 1,340,000 'hidden unemployed', those not considered part of the workforce,

but who are still looking for work, for a total of roughly three million job-seekers.



But it is a rare thing for a government to flatly admit that this – a sheer lack of jobs, not lazy, incompetent job-seekers – is the essence of the problem, let alone to admit the scale of the problem. Admitting this means having to relent on implementing punishing, unpleasant schemes like Work For The Dole and Compulsory Income Management, and means finally having to raise welfare payments (particularly Newstart, which has not been raised in real terms for 22 years).

While the under-supply of jobs is a problem for those searching for work, for the business community, a shortage of jobs is incredibly useful. A sizeable pool of job-seekers desperately competing over a small number of vacancies helps put downward pressure on wages, and also discourages low-income, insecure workers from

being too assertive about their rights and conditions, since they can often be easily and quickly replaced.

The massive lack of jobs is changing the nature of unemployment into an increasingly long-term phenomenon. Newstart, designed as a short-term payment, often cannot emotionally, physically, and socially sustain those forced to rely on it for many, many months – if not longer.

But there is hope: as Dr. Cassandra Goldie from ACOSS noted in her conference speech, public attitudes have started to shift, sympathy for those receiving Centrelink payments is starting to rise, as more and more people experience directly the realities of a hostile labour market, and an inadequate, onerous safety-net.

And more than that, there is a growing backlash from below against government attacks: low-income activists from four states – SA, Vic., NSW, and Qld. – and from a range of community groups – Australian Unemployed Workers' Union, Australian United Sole Parents Network, Fair Go For Pensioners, Willing Older Workers, and Anti-Poverty Network SA – came together in Adelaide, making this year's Anti-Poverty Week conference a historic gathering.

DEAR JOBS STATEWIDE

Dear Jobs Statewide,

I would like to apply for the position of case worker. I have good dehumanisation skills and I am experienced in cruelty toward poor people. I am a strong believer in the philosophy of 'if you don't have a job, you aren't trying hard enough.'

I think people should work to live and I would like to help crack down on the plague of unemployed people roting the system and taking our hard earned tax dollars. I don't believe in handing out free money, and I show creativity and initiative in coming up with new and challenging hoops for unemployed people to jump through. If they fail in the tasks I assign them, I have the capacity to breach them quickly and efficiently. It is their choice to do as I say, or not receive their Centrelink payment.

The tears of an unemployed person are like a gold star to me. If someone says they have a disability, I believe they are guilty unless proven disabled, and they will be on work for the dole unless they have a doctor's approval. After all, if someone wouldn't have survived in the 17th century, why should they survive now? They are holding back the advancement of humanity.

As I am young, fit and attractive, I will never be disabled, so you can count on me to be reliable. I will also make a nice contrast with the dishevelled scum that come through your doors on a regular basis. I have perfected my disgusted pout expression, which says 'please don't come within two feet of me, because I bet you smell'.

I have an aloof and impatient phone manner, and can yell when appropriate to keep job seekers in line. I have a talent for remembering empty cliches about hard work, and can utilise them to inspire even the most hopeless job seeker to change their attitude and turn their life around. I can assess at a glance if someone is employable or not, and put the corresponding effort into their case. I do not waste energy on old or ugly job seekers.

I work fast, exceed KPIs, and do not waste time on idle conversation or finding out about who the job seekers are. Because who are we kidding, they're basically all nobodies, and I can't have them thinking we have rapport or they might try to manipulate me into giving them something. My parents own a successful business, so I do not need this job, but I would like to give back to the community by helping turn lazy welfare bludgers into functioning members of society. I hope you will consider my application.

Yours Sincerely,

Jade Manson.

BYRON'S NEW CASE-WORKER

I had a job network appointment today. The new case worker wanted to get to know me. I never seem to get the chance to have an old case worker, just new ones. The case worker learned about the range of work I had done before, and a bit of the volunteering I do. She asked about my Work for the Dole and how that was going, and wanted to play with my resume so that they get money for playing with my resume.

I talked about a bit of the volunteering I do with the Anti-Poverty Network, she didn't want to know about that. Now the case manager wanted me to do "job club" on top of my work for the dole, potentially increasing my unemployment obligations from three to four days a week.

I said I really need two weekdays to myself: one for my own business, bills, shopping and such and one for my volunteering which is important. I said if the new activities were mandatory I would need to get that statement in writing from her before I would sign anything new.

Upon hearing this she said that I would do "whatever they tell me to do or I would not be getting paid", and that "welfare is not just free money anymore". She said that what she was telling me to do would be on my job plan and that she would print out a copy for me, got up promptly and did just that.

She came back with my job plan. I read it and said so long as the appointments are a part of the once a month contact that should be fine, and then swallowed my guts and said "you know that 'It's not free money anymore' comment you just made, organisations like yours can't just milk job-seekers for all they are worth either. We both have rules we have to follow."

Even as I spoke, and as bold as I like to think I am, I was still afraid. The power balance between job-seeker and provider is very much tilted

in the latter's favour, and yet I have taken challenging this as my job. She simply said, "no, the point is to find you a job." "That's right" I said.

She didn't pursue the matter any further and the appointment was ended immediately after that exchange. I will be surprised if she flatters herself with my company any more than she has to, and yet I will find myself checking my Centrelink account regularly for the next few days hoping my provider hasn't sanctioned my payment for being 'uncooperative'.

As politely uncooperative as I was, there were other things I wished I were free to say but I didn't dare. A Job-Centre case worker holds even more leverage than a boss. At least with a boss you have a social safety net. There are few strands left to catch a person losing the dole, before they become homeless.

As I walked out I remembered a moment long ago in that office, an incident that I wish I had the guts to intercede into but didn't. Even as I think on it now and write this I feel ashamed, more ashamed than I have ever felt for being unemployed.

An old looking man was getting grilled because he didn't know how to use the computers or other technology. His case worker was venting frustration on him saying he would never be employable, and accusing him of not bothering to learn, implying it was on purpose.

The old man was just looking down at his hands. Me and the guy sitting next to me in the next room just looked at each other, wordlessly exchanging a look of vicarious frustration and remorse. One of us whistled, implying "Fuckin ell", I'd hate to be that guy."

I thought on this and remembered that the only reason that all too many case workers feel perfectly free to provoke, embarrass, diminish or dominate job seekers, is the imbalance of power, and a culture of impunity they enjoy. In short they are becoming like cops. As such I realised that there are many things that job agency clients wish they could say without facing grave risks and sanction but cannot.

To that end I'd suggest, if you have a problem with Job Service Providers, pen a public or private letter to them and to the Department of Employment. It could be to specific workers or even just generally. It could be a minor and safe action to post and mail them to and around JSPs.

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NO PLACE LIKE HOMELESSNESS – LIVING ROUGH IN THE “LUCKY” COUNTRY | EVELYN KONSTANTINIDIS

In Australia today, it is estimated that more than 105,000 people are homeless. Of all people living homeless in Australia, 37.5 percent live in South Australia. That's disgraceful.

People experiencing homelessness face violation of a wide range of human rights. Access to safe and secure housing is one of the most basic human rights. A person who is homeless may face violations to the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to education, the right to the liberty and security of the person, the right to privacy, the right to social security and the right to freedom from discrimination. Recognising that homelessness impacts on a person's ability to enjoy basic human rights and freedoms can have important consequences for the way that our society perceives and treats homeless people.

Our human rights are protected by a number of international human rights treaties, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). As a party to all these treaties, Australia is under a legal and moral obligation to promote, protect and realise the human rights of all people.

Poverty and the inability to afford adequate housing, long-term or short-term unemployment, debt, housing market pressures, (such as rising rental and house prices), and the lack of public housing, are all central to the cause of homelessness. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has identified several categories of homelessness. For

some people, being homeless means being 'roofless' – living on the streets, in parks or in deserted buildings. For others, being homeless means moving between various types of temporary shelters, such as the homes of friends and relatives, refuges and hostels; or living in boarding houses with shared amenities but without security of tenure; or renting a caravan without security of tenure.

Homelessness affects a wide range of people from different regions, of different ages and different cultural backgrounds. Some groups, however, are particularly at risk of becoming homeless. These are:

Indigenous people - While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 2 percent of Australia's population, they represent 9 percent of the total homeless population.

Indigenous communities in all areas of Australia endure housing conditions well below those of the general population. Houses are typically overcrowded and lacking in basic amenities, such as adequate sewerage and access to telecommunications.

Women - Statistics suggest that as much as 42% of the homeless population in Australia is female.

Major causes of homelessness among women include domestic violence, sexual assault and family breakdown. Forced from their homes, some women do not identify themselves as homeless, but rather as targets of abuse, unable to return to their homes.

Children and young people - Current statistics show that almost half of all homeless persons are less than 24 years of age.

Homelessness amongst children and young people is strongly linked to relationship and family breakdown, domestic violence, physical and emotional abuse, anxiety or depression, unemployment and substance abuse.

People with mental illness - A large proportion of the homeless population is affected by mental illness. People with a mental illness often have difficulty accessing employment, education and support services, and generally lack control over their lives.

Refugees and asylum seekers - people coming to Australia as asylum-seekers or refugees are particularly vulnerable to homelessness due to poverty and social isolation. Visa conditions may restrict their right to work, their right to social security, entitlement to Medicare, and entitlement to government assistance for education and training.

The ageing - The widespread perception of high levels of home ownership among older people masks a situation where many older people are facing a housing crisis.

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The key factors driving the affordability crisis for older people include:

- The dramatic increase in the number of older people in Australia,
- The generational shift in government public housing priorities to housing younger people and families,
- Residential aged care being targeted to higher needs older people,
- The increased occurrence of older people retiring without owning a home,
- The current rate of closure of caravan parks.

Since human rights belong to everyone, it is in the interests of the Australian community as a whole to ensure that the rights of all people are respected and protected. If we take the view that homelessness violates human rights on the most fundamental level, it follows that a human rights response to homelessness, by all levels of government, is urgently required. This response would need to involve governments committing to and taking concrete and targeted legislative, policy and budgetary steps towards the full and immediate realisation of the human rights of homeless persons.

Providers would change within an industry every six months and I'd

have to explain my circumstances again, and again, and again...met by the same line of "be realistic" aagain, and again, and again.

That's not to say I haven't had good jobsearch providers. One of them referred me to her own psychologist, and it was of amazing benefit. She got me, she understood me...and there are workers like her that are out there, but sadly restricted by the system they work under, that leads to people being treated like a number, and not like...people.

The system is largely self-destructive. They claim to want to help you, but they often won't do simple, requested, research. In the end, sick of the runaround, I did my own

SILENT NO MORE

STORIES FROM BELOW THE

POVERTY-LINE

Anti-Poverty Network SA frequently publishes stories, some of them anonymous, from low-income people who wish to use their experience to challenge people's views about poverty, welfare, and unemployment. The stories show great hardship, but also great resilience. We feel privileged to be able to share some of the stories with you.

These stories are from the opening session of Power To The Poor – Silent No More, our Anti-Poverty Week conference, held on Friday October 21st and Saturday October 22nd.

WILLIAM

Prior to studying this year I was on Newstart for five years having left my position as a kitchenhand at the Lakes Resort due to living arrangements, as well as the break-down of my main form of transport.

So I spent years moving house, and bouncing between jobsearch providers. Finding more scorn than assistance. They always start off their

initial meetings asking what your interests are. I used to list them out - history, spirituality, religion and people. Later adding politics.

And I was always met by that heavy sigh and that predictable line of "be realistic". And then they'd proceed to line me up with all manner of hospitality jobs. And I recall the words of my head chef when I left

the Lakes Resort: *"You're one of the only people here that got along with everyone on every level of this establishment. You'll do far better working with people over plates and bowls."*

And yet, time, after time, after time, they tried forcing me back into that industry. Despite me asking constantly for different learning

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research into TAFE and got into the course I am currently studying. You can only ask so many times, and hit your head against the proverbial brick wall so many times, before you understand that the system is one of ugly dependence.

These jobsearch companies need the unemployed to get their grants. And so they are willing to do a half-arsed job, and treat people like a number, and not like the feeling beings that they are, in order to get their grants from the government. And since so many of them are private companies, naturally, they compete with each other.

They make money off the vulnerable. And it's disgusting.

I would go on. Basics Card, a complete attack on individual choice and autonomy. The fact that the Newstart Allowance hasn't been raised in real terms in twenty two years. And more to the point that the government is willing to blame the disenfranchised while failing outrageously to provide jobs.

We are not the villains here.

We are people with dreams, with aspirations, with ideas and creativity. We have families and friends. And sure we may not be at the top rung of society, but by the gods we survive. And we will keep on surviving, and off our backs, the government makes profit.

Maybe it's time they gave back some of it. Increased Newstart to a living wage. And brought in greater diversity to the employment range. Australia is stagnating. Hospitality, Mining, Aged Care, Retail, the only potential outcomes for the unemployed.

And really, only if you're young. Heaven forbid you're over thirty.

TRACEY

Most of the time I am okay, but sometimes I'm not, and it's times I am not okay, that I may need some help or assistance. I was initially going to speak about not having a social life being on a low income, but apparently those on a low income are not supposed to have a social life anyway, which brought me to this topic of 'The Shit People Say'.

Things that family or friends have said to me include comments such as "You're intelligent, why can't you get a job?". But what really pisses me off are the comments that have come from service providers who are meant to be unbiased.

I am not referring to services such as Centrelink or Job Networks, as unsupportive comments from services such as these can be expected and one could be somewhat prepared for those. The services I am referring to are those that I have sought out when things have become tight being on low income, charities and not for profit organisations. Comments and attitudes I have endured have been around how I spend my meagre allowance or how I may spend my time.

"How is it you can afford to feed your cats, but not pay your power bill?" And then upon receiving a food hamper, "here maybe you can feed your cats with this" as I was given a very small tin of tuna.

More recently, at the suggestion of her Housing Trust Manager, I requested assistance with trying to get my home in order. Apparently it did not meet the manager's expectations of what living standards one should live by, despite there being no actual danger

of not being able to safely evacuate the house in case of emergency.

Comments endured from the manager of this organisation included the assumption that I "must fall asleep in front of the TV a lot." Puzzled by this comment I asked the Housing Inclusion Manager why he was asking that. His reply was because there were blankets folded on the lounge.

He also suggested I should use some of my savings to purchase a kitchen cupboard for more storage. This was despite my having already obviously done so. There were also assumptions that I must drink a lot of alcohol, going by the number of bottles on top of the kitchen cabinet.

I told the case worker that I often win a voucher at karaoke and purchase a bottle of something nice for future outings. I felt I constantly had to justify why I did certain things, and what I had in my home.

The Housing Trust manager was more concerned with an egg shell that had blown onto the floor saying that it was some kind of health risk, than anything else that could be a risk factor in the kitchen, like the poor state of repair. I was told it was due for an upgrade over 10 years ago. At this point I said if he was so concerned about egg shells being a health risk, on his next visit I might just let all my chickens inside to see what he had to say about that.

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MICHAEL

It was my pleasure to make an oral presentation to the 2016 Anti-Poverty Week conference. The overarching theme that I was presenting was the use of “labels” by society, job networks, and Centrelink.

I am my own man and that means I am (in no specific order): a parent, high intellect, logical and strategic thinker, a man of Aboriginal descent, a former registered nurse, now divorced, have been living with HIV for 28 years, and live with many complex and odd issues.

Centrelink and various government organisations treat us citizens on the Disability Support Pension as a number, as they do with all other welfare recipients. We are not one homogeneous group, and from the aforementioned labels one can infer that out of the 100s of attendees at the conference, I am sure that not a single person in the audience of the conference would have the exact same health issues, career background, education, etc. That being said it's appalling that I'm forced to be squeezed and jammed into a metaphor category. That squeezing doesn't assist me to re-engage with employment and otherwise be a part of the wider community. I do feel like a square peg being jammed into a round hole.

ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



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