

# The Australian Community Psychologist

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## General Information

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## Editorial

Lauren J. Breen  
Curtin University, Australia

### Editorial

This is likely to be my last editorial for *The Australian Community Psychologist*. I've been Editor since 2008 and during this time have overseen the production of 10 issues, including 7 special issues/sections showcasing community psychology research and action on topics including Emerging Indigenous Researchers on Indigenous Psychologies, Fly-in/Fly-out Employment, Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> Trans-Tasman Community Psychology Conference, Innovation in Undergraduate Curriculum, Resilience, Showcasing Student Research, and Poverty Reduction (which was part of a global special issue on the topic). It has been a privilege to work with the guest editors, authors, and reviewers during this period.

I'm very pleased to introduce the second issue of 2013, which includes two articles, two research reports, one practice issues interview, and three book reviews. First, Joyce Doyle, Bradley Firebrace, Rachel Reilly, Tui Crumpen, and Kevin Rowley discuss the role of Rumbalara Football and Netball Club in promoting Indigenous wellbeing and show that the club is about far more than 'just' sport. Instead, they show that sporting clubs can also be a vehicle for bolstering cultural identity, building relationships between mainstream and Indigenous Australians, and the promotion of health and community engagement. In the second article, Lisa Hartley, Anne Pedersen, Caroline Fleay, and Sue Hoffman reflect upon their roles as academics engaging in social action pertaining to asylum seekers. Their discussion focuses on one example of collection action – an open letter – and outlines the ongoing debate about whether or not academics can and should engage politically in times of social injustice.

The first research report, by Alex McConville and Shiloh Groot, follows on thematically from Hartley and colleagues' work as it is also concerned with scholar-

activist engagement. In this case, however, the social injustice is the nexus between food insecurity and urban poverty. They provide a qualitative meta-analysis drawing on the literature and interviews with two key informants to provide in-depth knowledge on the complex policies and practices that work to generate and sustain food poverty. The second research report, by Kate Maassen, Julie Ann Pooley, and Myra Taylor, provides an analysis of homeless teenagers' experiences of residing in crisis accommodation. The authors interpret the findings in light of constructs such as resilience, sense of belonging, and needs.

These papers are followed by the Practice Issues section, which features an interview of Niki Harré by Nicholas Carr. Harré argues that community psychology has so far failed to integrate climate change and its effects into its theories and practices and describes her vision for a community psychology that embraces the connection between climate change and social justice. The interview is followed by three book reviews. Lyn O'Grady reviews Judith Dwyer, Zhanming Liang, Valerie Thiessen and Angelita Martini's *Project Management in Health and Community Services: Getting Good Ideas to Work*, Merryn Smith reviews Jon Stratton's *Uncertain Lives: Culture, Race and Neoliberalism in Australia*, and Susie Burke reviews Niki Harré's *Psychology for a Better World: Strategies to Inspire Sustainability*.

The first issue of 2014 will be a special issue devoted to work, community, and citizenship, guest edited by Charlotte Brownlow (University of Southern Queensland, Australia) Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist (University of Umeå, Sweden) and Lindsay O'Dell (The Open University, United Kingdom). The guest editors invite empirical and theoretical contributions from researchers and community activists around the globe. The deadline for submissions is Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2014. Further details, including instructions for authors, can be found at <http://>

[www.groups.psychology.org.au/ccom/publications/](http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/ccom/publications/)

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge and thank everyone who works towards making this journal great – the journal's editorial board (Charlotte Browlow, Carol Tutchener, Shiloh Groot, Anne Sibbel, Meg Smith, and Tahereh Ziaian); the production editor (Anne Sibbel); all the authors who chose to publish their work in ACP; and all the many manuscript reviewers who volunteer their time to ensure the journal's quality.

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## What makes us different? The role of Rumbalara Football and Netball Club in promoting Indigenous wellbeing

Joyce Doyle  
Bradley Firebrace  
Rachel Reilly  
Tui Crumpen  
Kevin Rowley

*Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit, The University of Melbourne, Australia*

*The Rumbalara Football and Netball Club has competed in regional football and netball leagues since 1997, continuing a tradition that began with the Cummergunja football teams of the 1890s. The Club is an important contributor to cultural identity for Aboriginal people in the Goulburn-Murray Rivers region of northern Victoria. It is a place where Aboriginal people can (re)connect with community, language, and stories of culture and history. It is also a vehicle for building relationships with mainstream Australia. Through competing in regional football and netball leagues, the Club brings Aboriginal community into mainstream society, working towards and demanding recognition, equality, and respect for Aboriginal people. The Club's hosting of visiting players and supporters enables mainstream visitors to accept reciprocity from the Aboriginal community. These characteristics of participation make up part of 'being healthy' for Aboriginal people. Because they drive engagement of Aboriginal people with the Club, they are foundational to the Club's programs and activities that fit with a more conventional definition of 'health promotion', including programs to increase physical activity and improve diet, promote engagement of young people in education, and facilitate employment opportunities. The Club also engages in research which seeks to describe the breadth, strategies, and effectiveness of this health promotion activity*

The Rumbalara Football and Netball Club (RFNC) was accepted into the Goulburn Valley Football League for the 1997 football and netball season. Since this acceptance into a mainstream<sup>1</sup> league, the Club has won a total of 20 premierships between the 4 football and 8 netball divisions. In 1999, the Goulburn Valley Football League second division split from the league, forming the Central Goulburn Football League (CGFL). Rumbalara's first-division football team won the CGFL's first premiership, won again in 2002, and was the runner-up in 2003 and 2004. The netball teams have been even more impressive, with the A-grade winning premiership in three consecutive years from 2001 to 2003 and then again in 2008. Since the first grand final victory in 1998 (exactly 100 years after the first premiership won by the Cummergunja team to which RFNC traces its ancestry), the Club has defied all the

odds.

Sport was the original activity that brought Aboriginal people to RFNC in 1997. This was due to a determination to strengthen cultural connections with other community members, their interest in and love of football, the opportunity to display talents and challenge the individuals' skills. The cultural connection provided the platform for Indigenous players, supporters, family, and community to come together in a setting they could call their own. Prior to the establishment of RFNC, these connections, for many people, were focused on attendance at funerals as the most frequent community event – as in other parts of Australia, the Aboriginal communities of the Goulburn-Murray Rivers Region experience high rates of premature morbidity and mortality. The establishment of RFNC began a journey that allowed Indigenous people to strengthen spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing,

through sport, connecting with the culture and sharing good lifestyle choices. Throughout this paper we refer to ‘culture’ and ‘cultural identity’. Our definitions focus on the relationships between people, and the unique ways in which Aboriginal people relate to each other and to their environment. Although football is arguably not a ‘traditional’ activity, and RFNC competes in a mainstream league, it nevertheless provides a safe space in which Aboriginal culture can be expressed in ways not possible in the wider society. We also refer to ‘assimilation’, which we define as the process of weakening these cultural ways of relating and connecting.

In addition to sport, RFNC offers programs to address other leadership skills. It offers career advice, work readiness, and employment access, financial literacy, healthy lifestyle choices through canteen policies and fitness programs, education, diabetes awareness, as well as research and reconciliation opportunities. The Club is a family-friendly place for the teams, family members, and community, and supports cultural values and identity. It allows Indigenous people the freedom to express their culture. The Club engages with the wider community to break down cultural barriers by helping them to understand the local Indigenous people.

In this paper our objective is to describe the role that Rumbalara Football Netball Club plays in promoting health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people in the Goulburn-Murray Rivers Region of northern Victoria. We discuss the history of RFNC, Indigenous understandings of health and wellbeing, Club programs, cultural identity, and RFNC’s role in healing and ‘closing the gap’. This paper is written from a community-based, ‘insider’ perspective. To complement the first author’s narrative, information from the research literature, RFNC program reports, and other sources is presented in boxes throughout the manuscript.

### **History of RFNC**

To understand RFNC, we will need to reflect back into the local Indigenous history, a topic not many people want to hear or talk about due to the lack of understanding of its importance to wellbeing today. The abrupt interruption to Indigenous culture, the loss of the land and its tribal connections could have been described as genocide. Aboriginal people were forced from their traditional lands, often violently, to make way for white settlement and agriculture. RFNC exists to provide opportunities for community members to strengthen cultural connectedness and to heal the damaging and unresolved effects of this earlier history.

Cummeragunja reserve on the banks of the Dhungalla (the Murray River’s traditional name) is where the history of football began for the Indigenous people. By the late 1800s, Cummeragunja had a professional football team competing in the Nathalia and District League, taking its first premierships in 1898 and 1899 winning 6 Picola League premierships in 11 seasons during the 1920s and ’30s. The team’s strength stirred discontent within the League and in 1932 an arbitrary new rule set the maximum age for any player at 25 years, excluding many of Cummeragunja’s star players. This rejection set the stage for the many challenges the Indigenous community would face with the forming of the RFNC.

This region has a history of producing strong, nationally, and internationally prominent leaders like William Cooper and Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls, involved in the struggles for citizenship, social justice, human rights, and respect for Aboriginal people. This struggle has now been taken up by current leaders of the Yorta Yorta Clans including RFNC President Mr Paul Briggs who has challenged his leadership skills to take on the local football league for the wellbeing of the Indigenous community. Contemporary community leaders saw a need to bring community members together more closely and worked to establish the Club as a means to



do this. There was a long struggle to enter an established football league, due to opposition from other clubs based on purported inadequacy of facilities, perceptions that Aboriginal players were ‘bullies’, and other negative racial stereotypes promoted by mainstream media.

Today, the vision of RFNC is “to be nationally recognised as the leading

Aboriginal Sporting Club, for its success on and off the sporting arena, strong cultural identity, expression and celebration, and contribution to equal life opportunities for all Australians.” The Club provides a welcoming gateway to social inclusion for all Indigenous people and its visitors (see Box 1).

The Club’s journey has had many positive and negative moments. Our challenge is trying

**Box 1 – Community Engagement**

The RFNC had about 300 registered players in 2011, about half of them women (Figure 1a). This represents a steady increase in women’s participation since 1997, and is part of a trend to increasing total player registrations. The Club currently fields four football teams and nine netball teams. In addition, the Club had almost 250 social members by 2011, including a large proportion of non-Indigenous social members (Figure 1b).

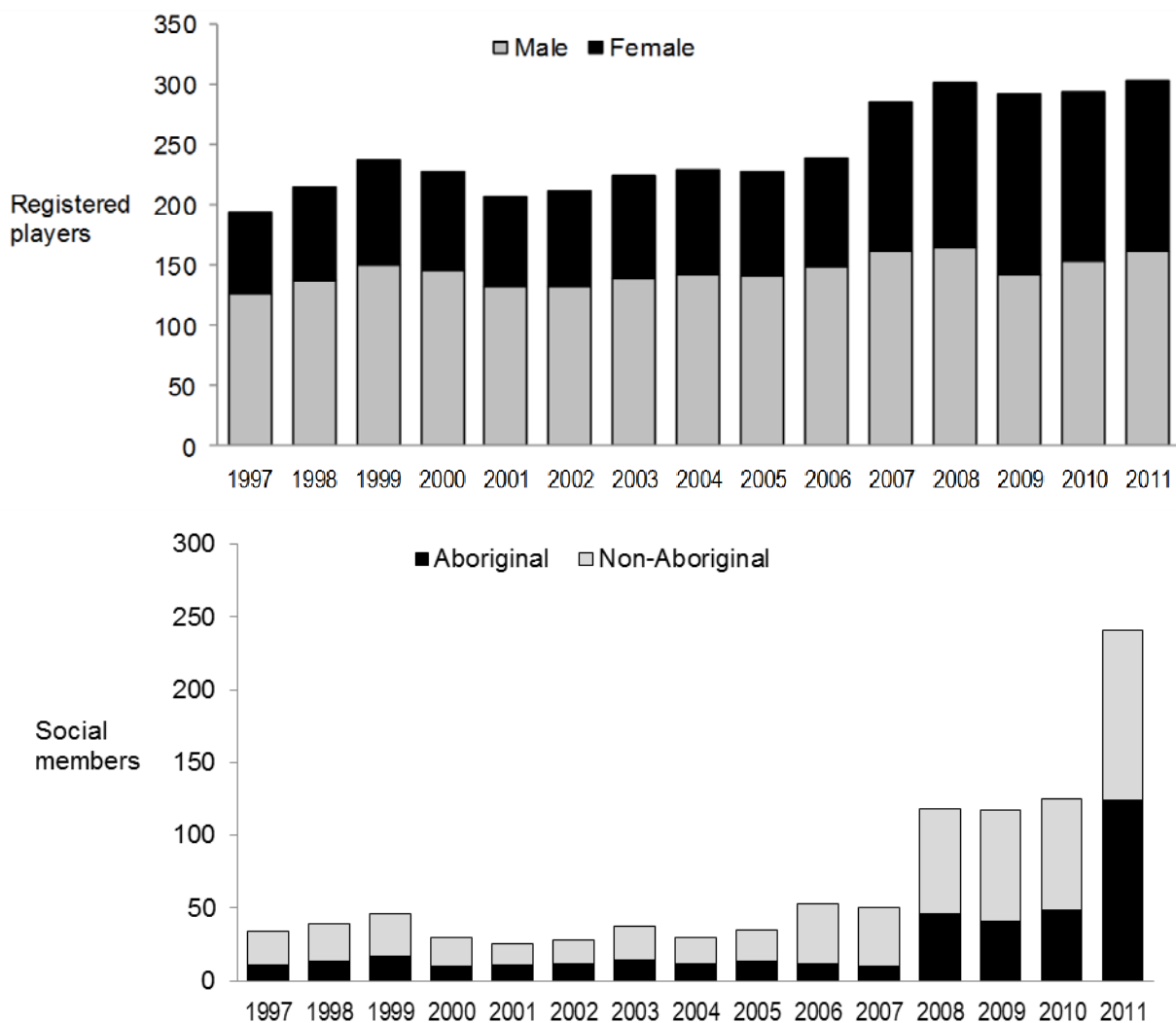


Figure 1: Trends in a) player registrations and b) social membership at RFNC, 1997-2011.

to present enough information about some of the positive impacts on Aboriginal and mainstream communities, to provide a good sense of who we are, and what community gains from the presence and the strength of cultural identity from the RFNC. For example, one of the Club's successes has been the reversal of attitudes of League representatives, from opposition to RFNC entering the competition at all (as recently as 2009) to RFNC being considered for hosting a grand final. This event was significant because it represented a change in attitude towards Aboriginal people, from negative stereotypes to acknowledgement of the skills within the Aboriginal community. For this brief moment, the basic cause of the health disparity for Aboriginal people, that is, discrimination, was overcome.

### **Health and Wellbeing within the RFNC**

Typical definitions of health define it as the absence of illness or injury. Indigenous definitions are more complex. The National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) Working Party (1989) definition states that:

Aboriginal health means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their Community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life. (p. x)

When we talk about the term 'health and wellbeing', it could mean many things but as an Indigenous person living in the shadow of assimilation it becomes quite clear what health and wellbeing should look like. This involves every person being able to make decisions and have access to what they choose (under the law), without restrictions or racial discrimination and

ramifications, in a country to which they are spiritually connected. Most of all, being well requires respect, healthy thinking, and access to basic living needs, education, employment, and housing.

The RFNC can promote the health and wellbeing of its community through participating in games, by members being part of the Club's activities, and through bringing families out of their homes and into the Club. While it is seen by the wider community and government bodies as just a football and netball club competing in a league, for Aboriginal people it is more significant than just a sporting venue. RFNC is a place where Aboriginal wellbeing surrounds people, nurturing them with cultural strength, identity, pride, and beliefs.

### **RFNC Programs**

RFNC's programs engage the Indigenous community and provide a meeting space that allows individuals, families, and young people to participate in the wider Goulburn Valley community without losing their cultural identity. These programs address wellbeing as defined by our earlier research which identified determinants of health and wellbeing for local Aboriginal people, with five key themes emerging: 1) history; 2) relationship with mainstream community; 3) having a sense of control; 4) connectedness; and 5) threats to wellbeing. This work subsequently formed the basis of designing programs at RFNC (Reilly, Doyle, Firebrace, Morgan-Bulled, Cargo, & Rowley, 2008).

The RFNC provides not just a platform, but a path that engages the wider community to participate in a strong cultural identity through sport and social inclusion. Aboriginal peoples' roots and history are bedded in the earth of this amazing landscape as far back 80,000 years. RFNC and its programs are a part of this continuous history, designed and delivered in a way that recognises and builds on this history, and are therefore designed to strengthen Indigenous culture and wellbeing, not promote

assimilation. Programs include healthy lifestyles – discussion of healthy food choices, water intake, and the effect of dehydration. The Club provides healthy meals for players, supporters and families once a week. It provides junior players with fresh fruit before practice twice a week. Other supporting programs provide mentoring in the schools and in the Club and engagement with mainstream business in providing players and community the opportunity for employment through the Rumba Ripples Program. This program seems to be very successful and well received by the community; a success that could be due to the fact that each Koori young person taking on a job has total support from the Club and doesn't feel so isolated and afraid. Junior development at RFNC is discussed in Box 2.

Current Club programs targeting youth and other sections of community all seek to more closely engage community members in the Club and with each other. This extends to engaging positively with mainstream community, including the annual Unity Cup between RFNC and Congupna Football Club with the support of the Murray Football League. The Unity Cup started in 2008 and has become an annual event with the focus on respect and leadership and provides the potential to overcome divisions in the community. The RFNC provides Indigenous and non-Indigenous people the opportunity to display leadership in a cultural setting, and strives to be recognised not just as a sports club but also for the role it has taken on to protect and provide the spiritual needs for the local Indigenous community.

### **Box 2 – Junior Development**

Senior RFNC players who have played in elite junior or senior squads (including the Australian Football League [AFL]) are more aware of nutrition and how it affects fitness and performance. They have often received detailed menus on what to eat when and exercise diaries to monitor prescribed exercise routines as part of their training regimes, although it is not always possible to follow instructions depending on what is available to eat at home. Players with this training tend to find it easier to keep off excess weight than do other players. This type of education was seen as a gap for junior players at the Club and nutrition education was included as part of the *Hungry for Victory* program in 2006 to address this issue (Reilly, Doyle, & Rowley, 2007).

The Academy of Sport, Health, and Education (ASHE) is a partnership between RFNC and The University of Melbourne to re-engage young people in formal education by offering Certificate level courses in fitness, sport, health, personal development. ASHE has been a major influence on Bradley Firebrace. He originally only attended because it was a football club initiative and was encouraged to go by the club President. There were only five students in the first cohort, and plenty of teething problems. He remained studying at ASHE because he developed strong interest in the courses on offer and saw the value of gaining qualifications (in his case, Certificate Level III in Fitness and Certificate Level IV in Community Development). The learning environment is flexible, with a lot of support for students academically and personally. Having a group of students working there together was an attraction, as opposed to an individual approach where students are expected to go away and learn on their own. He felt it was a safe place to speak up – whereas he lacked confidence to answer questions or contribute in a mainstream setting for fear of getting answers wrong, at ASHE he felt supported to contribute and not afraid to make mistakes. Importantly, although ASHE was originally established with the idea of using sport as the hook to re-engage students who had dropped out of education, it has also recruited many young people who do not play sport at RFNC but who do wish to re-enter the education system, as well as people who have finished school and are working but who wish to gain extra qualifications. ASHE also undertakes programs with primary and secondary school students such as ASHEletics and Indigenous sport carnivals. ASHE also now has students from interstate as well as local people.

**Box 3 – RFNC Programs and Partnerships**

Figure 2 summarises programs conducted by RFNC in 2011. Programs in healthy lifestyles have included a range of activities and strategies to help people make healthy choices in diet and exercise. In addition to the junior development activities noted below, the program has included: discussion of healthy food choices, water intake, and the effect of dehydration; the provision of healthy meals for players, supporters and families once a week at training; provision of fresh fruit for junior players before practice twice weekly; and a healthy canteen policy (Reilly et al., 2011). The Club has partnered with other organisations to design and run a strength training program for Elders with or at risk of diabetes, and other programs to increase physical activity and healthy diet.

In recognition of the importance of socioeconomic determinants of health, the Club has engaged in programs for education (see below), financial literacy (B. Briggs & Reilly, 2010), and employment (*Rumba Ripples*, which has placed over 120 people into employment in local businesses). ASHE is a major program conducted in partnership with The University of Melbourne, which re-engages youth in education through Certificate-level and short courses (see Figure 2). In addition to its own teaching, ASHE facilitates the Club's outreach programs to local schools – *Munarra Youth Futures* supports students in the upper primary and high school environment, with the aim of increasing attendance at and commitment to both education and in the sports club setting; *Dream, Learn, Achieve* targets students in Years 8 and 9 who are disengaged from school, with the aim of encouraging them to remain in school and supporting the Koori Student Education Officers' role; and providing accredited modules in cultural studies, community development, sport, and information technology. Certificate V level ASHE students acted as mentors for program participants. Most programs are conducted in partnership with other organisations. Major partners include Visy and the Pratt Foundation, Doxa Youth Foundation, Essendon Football Club and the AFL, Netball Victoria and the Melbourne Vixens, The University of Melbourne, Goulburn Ovens TAFE, The City of Greater Shepparton, VicHealth, and State and Commonwealth Government Departments.

Details of RFNC programs are shown in Box 3.

**Supporting Cultural Identity**

Involvement with the Club has taken the first author Joyce Doyle on a journey of excitement, pride and sometimes heartache with many struggles that are difficult to share with others. For Joyce, being involved in the Club has strengthened her spirit, nurtured cultural identity, and provided a pride that is difficult to describe. Without the Club, Joyce would be locked into the assimilation policy of the mainstream that assumes there are no 'real Aborigines' in Victoria (P. Briggs, 2006), and that it is not okay to identify as different from mainstream Australia. Thus, the Indigenous people in Victoria have another struggle, regarding their identity. We don't have a problem with identity; it is the rest of society who have a problem with *our* identity. We, Koori people of Victoria, are put in the box of 'assimilation' where we are expected to behave just as the white Australians do.

The term cultural identity is so often used but never really thought about in terms of Indigenous people and their sport. RFNC is all about Aboriginal cultural identity but it also engages in dialogue with mainstream society and recognises its cultural identity too. The Club provides an environment that showcases an Indigenous football and netball team, in colours that represent the people's identity – blue for the river, yellow for the sun, black for the people, and red for the earth. In the Club's social rooms, photographs of past and present players are displayed, including important community leaders and elite athletes like the late Pastor Sir Douglas Nichols. These images provide a cultural connection for families and a sense of pride in the Club's journey involving the achievements of community members who have overcome all barriers to excel in their chosen fields.

RFNC provides the cultural connection between identity and respect. It allows

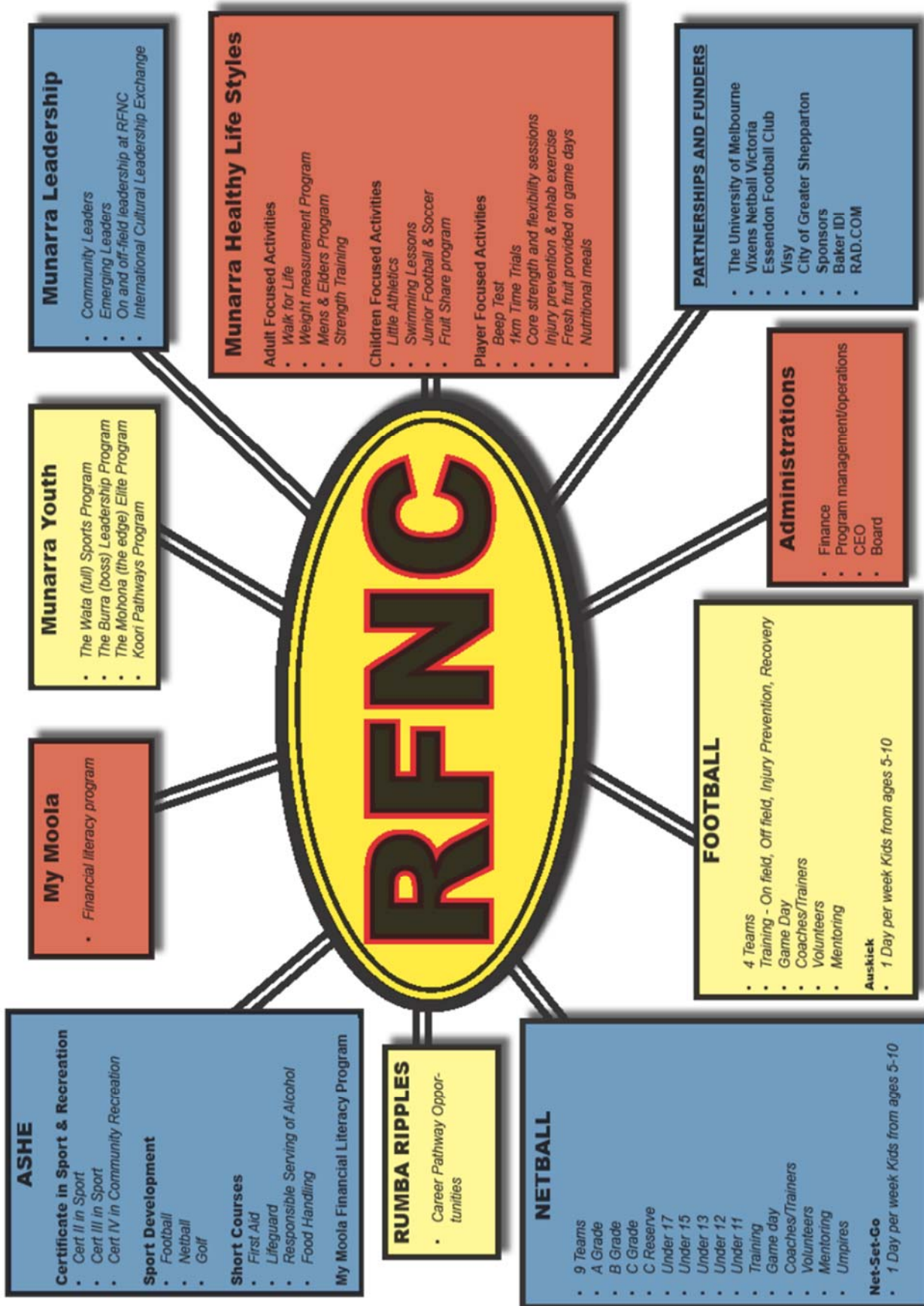


Figure 2. Summary of RFNC program areas, 2011.

Aboriginal people to identify with their culture in a setting that displays respect for and pride in Aboriginal culture. It allows engagement with mainstream community in a way that promotes mutual respect. It promotes togetherness, inclusion, reconciliation, and Aboriginal

leadership in a setting that allows our identity to flow into and be recognised by other sporting clubs and the wider community. This is an essential part of being 'healthy' in mind, body, and spirit for Aboriginal people (see

#### **Box 4 – Further Reflections on Cultural Identity, Sport, and the RFNC from a Psychology Perspective**

Cultural or ethnic identity is an important component of a sense of self. The formation of identity occurs most actively during adolescence and serves as a guiding framework during adulthood. Cultural identity has been linked to various important outcome measures including self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor, 2005), an ability to cope with discrimination, academic achievement and reduced risk of suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Luke et al., 2013). However, there is some variation in findings relating to the association between cultural identity and these positive factors. Umaña-Taylor (2005), suggests that this variation may be explained by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which posits that identity develops from both a sense of belonging to a cultural group, as well as an affective component (i.e., how you feel about that sense of group belonging). Therefore, favourable appraisals of group membership will have a positive impact on self-esteem, but situations where group membership is associated with a negative social environment marred by discrimination, prejudice, or exclusion may have a negative impact on self-esteem.

Mainstream, nationalist images of Australian identity stem from colonial times and tend to be white, masculine pioneers, 'diggers' or sportsmen. Aboriginal identity sits outside this stereotype and is, even in modern mainstream discourse, largely defined by outdated racial criteria (Langton, 2013). The 'authenticity' of Aboriginal identity tends to be determined within this discourse by the extent to which Aboriginal people remain uncontaminated – racially and culturally – by Anglo Australia, leading to simplistic judgments being made on the basis of appearance and in binary terms of black and white (e.g., Bolt, 2009). In reality, as is acknowledged by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nations General Assembly, 2008), such racial understandings of Aboriginal identity are unscientific and outdated. However, individuals and communities who fail to fit the stereotype of the 'traditional', dark-skinned Aborigine continue to find their identities as Aboriginal people under scrutiny and attack (Hallinan & Judd, 2007). An alternative view conceptualises Aboriginal identity as fluid, diverse, complex, and arising from interactions between Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal people and other Australians (Langton, 1993; Russell, 2006).

Within this context, like many Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, the RFNC provides a vehicle for the formation and expression of Aboriginal identity in ways that are not necessarily supported in mainstream workplaces, schools, and other settings. The club facilitates interaction between Aboriginal people resulting in a strengthening of identity. As reported in Reilly, Doyle, Bretherton, and Rowley (2008) a Club member explains:

*I think it's just a great club because it's a place where people can connect and through connection there comes empowerment, there comes strength, there comes pride, there comes things like sharing, caring, not that everything's always perfect, relationships aren't perfect between the community and stuff but it's the fact that people can come together because I think if people don't connect that's where a lot of things get lost. Your heritage gets lost, your history gets lost, your sense of identity gets lost, you don't know who you are, possibly. Being around an Aboriginal community strengthens your identity all the time. Consistently it strengthens that or I suppose it reminds you and empowers that thing of well, I belong, I mean something, I'm worth something, that type of thing. (p. 363)*

Also, while a sense of marginalisation is a common experience for Aboriginal people in Shepparton, RFNC works against this by facilitating cross-cultural interaction where:

*...for once it's like Aboriginal people can host the wider community instead of us always going to their*

**Box 4 continued**

*place. We can say ok this is our place and come and play. . .we want to play the host. It just gives people an opportunity to mix with and meet Aboriginal people where possibly they would never have had the chance to or had a reason to but now they have a reason to so it's just opening up all those types of doors. . .So when non-Aboriginal people come to the club, it's a feeling of acceptance. So you're accepting us, you're coming to our place, and it's that reciprocity. We're offering you something and you're accepting it.* (Reilly, Doyle et al., 2008, p. 361)

As such, RFNC is a place where Aboriginal identity is defined by Aboriginal people. This allows non-Aboriginal people to experience Aboriginal identity in a way that challenges stereotypes, works against binary, racial categorising and is non-confrontational. In relation to Aboriginal organisations in the Goulburn Murray, including RFNC, Reilly, Doyle et al. (2008) conclude that by providing a safe place for cultural expression, these organisations are inherently health-promoting as they strengthen community cohesion and identity.

It is widely accepted that participation in sport is associated with a number of physical and social benefits. A number of developmental benefits relevant to healthy identity development and self-esteem on an individual and social level arise from sport participation (Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011). These include making friends, learning about teamwork and improved academic performance, as well as developing emotional control, confidence and self-discipline. For Aboriginal children, participation in sport has been shown to facilitate a positive collective identity and positive interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peers (Kickett-Tucker, 2008). The physical benefits of sport stem from engaging in physical activity, but also from increased motivation to engage in positive health behaviours such as eating well and avoiding drugs and alcohol (Holt et al., 2011). At RFNC, the potential for sport to support the wellbeing of young members by strengthening a sense of belonging to the Aboriginal community, as well as supporting an identity built around taking care of oneself physically in order to play sport and support their team is exemplified by the 'Hungry for Victory' Program, described by Reilly et al. (2007).

This is one of many health promotion programs that have been implemented at RFNC that are significant because of their ecological approach to supporting wellbeing (Reilly et al., 2011). An ecological approach acknowledges that the health of an individual is influenced by the physical and social environment. That is, a person's health cannot be considered in isolation from their family, community, organisation, or broader society. This is consistent with Holt et al. (2011) who found that for low-income families particularly, a number of environmental factors, such as family environment and financial constraints, acted as barriers to young people sustaining their participation in sport. Such barriers also exist for some young people at RFNC where attrition as young members move into higher age-groups has been documented (O'Brien, Paradies, & Reilly, 2009). By targeting programs aimed at strengthening cultural identity, such as the Munarra Leadership Program, at the age-group which is most at risk of attrition – adolescence – the Club contributes to supporting an identity based on a sense of connectedness, and confident participation in community activities which include but are not limited to sport.

A number of challenges remain. Some community members may not access Club programs because they do not share an interest in sport and consequently feel excluded, despite the Club's efforts to be 'more than just a sporting club.' Even for those who do participate in sport, which for the most part represents an opportunity to experience empowerment, it can also reinforce disempowerment with the experience of loss, failure, or disappointment. Also, experiences of racism remain relatively common in sport in Shepparton, as in all parts of Victoria (Hallinan & Judd, 2007; Reilly, Doyle, Bretherton, et al., 2008). Although overt racism on the field is at least witnessed and penalised, less overt racism, such as the increased surveillance of Aboriginal players, and a tendency to label the whole team or whole club on the basis of one negative incident, can remain a challenge, as documented by Hallinan and Judd (2007). There is also the challenge of translating the positive interactions that occur between players on the field to positive changes in the broader community. There is a danger that positive discourses within the sporting arena can be seen as the exception to the rule in an otherwise dominant discourse of deficit



**Box 4 continued**

(Bamblett, 2011). Lastly, there is the significant challenge of finding the financial resources to keep the Club going in an otherwise resource-poor environment. A reliance on external funding means that Club leaders are required to continually communicate the importance and value of the Club to funding bodies and have no guarantee that funding will continue beyond a particular funding round. These are some of the challenges that RFNC continues to negotiate as it has over the past decade.

Box 4).

their spirits lifted.

**A Healing Place**

For Joyce, it is important to have a place that provides an identity that entitles her to say out loud ‘who I am’ and not be ashamed. RFNC provides many community members with such a place. And what about our white counterparts, the guests we cater for at every home game? There is no resentment – we enjoy talking, showing, presenting, and sharing what has become a ceremonial ground (meeting place) for local Indigenous people of this region. There is a sense of spiritual strength that empowers us to contribute to society in a respectful and fruitful way. We need to share this amazing journey with mainstream, hoping it will enlighten them to look at their clubs and maybe follow our lead.

There has been a change in attitude of visiting players and spectators over the years. We used to hear people talking about stereotypes – kids unsupervised, running wild etcetera. We don’t hear that as often anymore. The Club has been running for 12 years and people have been exposed to Indigenous culture and identity over the years wherein our visiting teams and supporters have seen that we are only people, the same as them in many ways. There is now more interaction, and more friendly interaction, between cultures. This also promotes wellbeing – ‘relationship with mainstream’ is a determinant of health for Aboriginal people (Reilly, Doyle, Bretherton, & Rowley, 2008).

Thus, RFNC is a healing place for individuals and for the relationship between Aboriginal and mainstream Australia. It has been described as grandmother’s kitchen table – a place where anyone can laugh and share stories, be welcomed, fed, and loved, and have

**Relevance to Close The Gap Policy**

The RFNC appears to tick many of the boxes when it comes to prevention in health and overall wellbeing in the Indigenous community. The government’s ‘Closing The Gap’ dollars are an important contribution for organisations that focus on Indigenous wellbeing, but unfortunately Closing The Gap resources are mainly being channelled into crisis intervention through recognised clinical health organisations. Organisations like RFNC make a major contribution to disease prevention and health promotion by supporting identity, respect, and relationships between Indigenous and mainstream Australia, in line with state health promotion policies (see Box 5). The RFNC provides a holistic view of wellbeing, nutrition, and physical activity that incorporates the social determinants of health. Unfortunately, organisations like RFNC are ineligible for much of the funding allocated to closing the health gap, leaving the younger generation at risk of a widening health gap.

**Challenges for RFNC**

RFNC runs many programs in response to community needs and as a result risks being spread too thin. There are many mainstream programs addressing health, employment, etcetera, but Club programs are based on local culture and are run in an environment that supports, not attacks or ignores, Indigenous cultures. As such, community members participate in Club teams and programs even if they have fewer material resources, human resources, and insecure funding.

The RFNC is unable to build the bridge



**Box 5 – RFNC and Health Promotion Policy**

The activities of RFNC closely parallel Victorian State frameworks for Aboriginal health promotion. Programs run at various times in the Club's history have implemented many of the recommendations of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)'s Aboriginal Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy (Thorpe & Browne, 2009) and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's Aboriginal health promotion framework (Kelly, 2011).

The VACCHO strategy's recommendations fall within eight areas which include:

*Action Area 1 – Aboriginal nutrition and physical activity workforce capacity.* RFNC staff members have been supported to gain qualifications in diabetes education, nursing, personal training, sports training, first aid, community nutrition, and health program development (Reilly et al., 2001). Partnerships with other organisations, such as Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative and Viney Morgan Aboriginal Medical Service as part of the Heart Health Project (Heart Health Project Steering Committee, 2007) have facilitated capacity exchange in nutrition and other areas.

*Action Area 2 - Food security.* 'Binji Business', a family-based home gardening initiative, addressed local food production (Department of Rural Health, 2001). 'Fruit Share' was probably a major contributor to fruit intake for some Club members (Reilly et al., 2011) and the provision of healthy meals on training nights for players and club members promoted good nutrition in a culturally appropriate setting.

*Action Area 3 – Public policy to support healthy eating and physical activity in key settings.* The Club's Healthy Canteen Policy resulted in a remarkably good nutritional quality of foods supplied through RFNC on match days and at training, particularly in the context of being a sporting club (Reilly et al., 2011). Advocacy to have drinking taps installed around the ground was undertaken. Strategies targeting junior Club members and visiting players included the 'Hungry for Victory' project that incorporated a match-day breakfast program, education and mentoring by senior players (Reilly et al., 2007), and of course the establishment of junior football and netball teams. RFNC's partnership with ASHE facilitates promotion of healthy eating and physical activity for young people enrolled in ASHE courses, and through implementation of the Munarra Youth Futures project in schools.

*Action Area 4 – Interventions to increase healthy eating and physical activity.* RFNC has developed a number of initiatives to facilitate healthy eating and physical activity, both through directly implementing nutrition and exercise programs (Healthy Lifestyles Program, Makin' A Move, Elders' Strength Training, football and netball training), through education, and by financial literacy training (B. Briggs & Reilly, 2010).

*Action Area 8 – Research and evaluation.* RFNC has collaborated with The University of Melbourne and other research institutions to evaluate its programs for many years. For example, The Heart Health Project was a participatory action research project that investigated various aspects of cardiovascular risk, developed implementation, and evaluation protocols for community-based projects, and researched food security issues (Heart Health Project Steering Committee, 2007; Reilly et al., 2007). Current work includes the development of monitoring and evaluation tools for health promotion activities in community organisations.

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's framework for Aboriginal health promotion identified three priority areas in the broad domains of social determinants of health, risk factors, and access to health services (Kelly, 2011). RFNC programs address the majority of the specific issues within the priority areas. In the social determinants of health (Priority 1), Club programs (see above) have operated in the areas of 'educational attainment'; 'family and community connections' (by being a meeting place for connecting community); 'income, employment, and housing'; 'race-based discrimination' (the annual Unity Cup match with Congupna FC is an important reconciliation event, home games are an opportunity for Aboriginal community to host the mainstream in a positive environment); and 'Land, culture, and identity' (RFNC is a visible expression of Aboriginal culture and identity). Priority 2 of the framework deals with reducing exposure to health-damaging factors and vulnerability to their effects: tobacco; physical activity (in addition to training programs for players, RFNC has supported physical activity for other Club members including the Healthy Lifestyles, Elders' Strength Training and Makin' A Move programs); nutrition and food security (addressed through programs like Fruit Share, Binji Business and other healthy lifestyles programs); and alcohol (RFNC has responsible serving of alcohol policies in place, and a ban on BYO alcohol at home ground matches).

**Box 5 continued**

The third priority area for VicHealth is the reduction of consequences of ill-health as a result of inappropriate access to health care and treatment. To this end, RFNC has partnered with Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative to provide health checks at the ground on training nights, and has run heart health risk factor screening as part of pre-season training programs. This has facilitated access to health checks by young men, a population subgroup that is otherwise difficult to engage. To prevent suicide among local Aboriginal youth the RFNC acts as an agent that engages youth participation, provides a culturally safe environment, provides community attention, cultural affirmation, identity, value for the

to reconciliation without the help of mainstream culture; working together makes anything possible. As a prominent organisation in this space, RFNC members are in the spotlight – Club members have to perform above the level of their non-Indigenous counterparts to avoid public criticism. This requires strong cultural leadership through programs and funding allocation and this can make it difficult for some people to stay engaged with the Club.

The Club is leading the way in prevention in many of the life-threatening diseases surrounding our younger generation, including those arising from lack of physical activity and poor emotional and social wellbeing. However there are challenges in terms of connecting with and addressing issues for the next generation of young people who seem to have different values, priorities, pressures and threats to their wellbeing, which are not clear to older people. Investigation of these issues is required in order for RFNC to be able to respond appropriately.

**What Makes us Different?**

Throughout its 15-year journey, the RFNC has challenged, inspired and changed the concept of the term ‘sporting club’. Like many sporting clubs, RFNC operates on limited human and material resources, and struggles to maintain a secure financial base, to field teams each week as well as deliver health programs in a setting that focuses on being well, not on illness. What makes the Club different is its links to the history of Indigenous struggles to maintain cultural identity and cultural inclusion. The RFNC is a place of uniqueness in the Goulburn Valley and nationally. It is a

place where Indigenous people can display talent in sport, strength in communication, leadership, and cultural identity. The RFNC is a place for community celebration. The football arena is mainly a male space, but women have become more involved through netball, support roles and other Club activities. The venue could very well be called a ‘health retreat’ where one can inhale a large dose of identity, soak up the strength, and engage in social inclusion within the wider community.

The ground has a sense of spiritual guidance that surrounds its boundaries and watches out for the people with unexpected returns in story lines and winning games. This icon (RFNC) reflects the heart and soul of the local Indigenous community but is not usually represented with pride by the wider mainstream community.

**Conclusion**

Within its vision, RFNC aims to provide leadership through transparent characteristics – activities are visible for all members of the Indigenous and mainstream communities to see. Thus, RFNC gives the Indigenous community a glimmer of hope towards a future in which it can engage with all community. It provides an environment where visitors to RFNC can engage with the Indigenous community in a positive way and experience Indigenous culture on Indigenous terms in their own place, as guests of the Indigenous community. Visitors to anywhere are expected to behave in a certain way – respectfully. The Club seeks to ‘raise the bar’

– it takes people out of their homes in ‘suburban’ areas into a place where Indigenous culture and language are visible. It places greater expectations on Indigenous people to contribute to and interact within community as well as being a place where they can interact with mainstream community –but on Indigenous terms and conditions. Thus, RFNC promotes equality and takes all involved on a journey of tolerance and acceptance towards leadership and Indigenous and non-Indigenous healing through the sports arena.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document the term “mainstream” refers to the non-Indigenous community.

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## Author biographies

Joyce Doyle is a Yorta Yorta woman from the Goulburn Valley. She started community work in the 1970s as an Aboriginal Educator, worked in the education system until 1984 then studied for a BA(Ed) at Deakin University. She returned to the Goulburn Valley community in 1999, working in Jemuria (an Aboriginal youth education initiative) through the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system for 3 years, and at Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative in Mooroopna as Chief Executive Officer and later as Manager of the medical centre. Joyce has had a number of roles in working in the mainstream sector and ran for local government Council in 1995. For most of her life Joyce has worked in her community and has been with the Rumbalara Football Netball Club since it began in 1997 in a number of roles – Board member, Youth Leadership role, Program Management, Researcher, Volunteer and Canteen Manager.

Bradley Firebrace and Tui Crumpen are also local community members who have contributed background information on RFNC’s junior development activities and community engagement respectively.

Rachel Reilly is of Anglo-Celtic background and contributed contextual information on identity and health from a health psychology perspective.

Kevin Rowley is an Australian of Celtic-Anglo background, born in Melbourne, with academic training and experience in biochemistry, epidemiology and health program evaluation. Both Rachel Reilly and Kevin Rowley have worked with Aboriginal community organisations in the Goulburn Valley for over 10 years on various research projects and been volunteers and occasional players at RFNC.

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## **“The situation is hopeless; we must take the next step”: Reflecting on social action by academics in asylum seeker policy debate**

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*In this article, we reflect on the involvement of academics in the asylum seeker rights movement in Australia by documenting a collective action that was driven by the authors of this paper. This action was an open letter signed by 204 academics from a range of disciplines which voiced opposition to a number of asylum seeker policies proposed by the two major political parties in mid-2012. Despite the noteworthy number of academic signatories to the letter, the question of whether academics have the responsibility to voice their concerns about social injustices remains a contentious issue. This is particularly so within mainstream psychology. In the first part of this paper, we draw on the foundations of community psychology to argue that academics that bear witness to the negative impact of asylum seeker policy have an ethical responsibility to engage in social actions outside of academia in response to what they witness. We also argue that this responsibility should be coupled with a reflection on the impacts of such social action. As such, in the second part of this paper, we critically reflect on the outcomes of the open letter action as part of bearing witness and consider why members of the asylum seeker rights movement keep going on in the face of very challenging political circumstances.*

The well-known quote, “the situation is hopeless; we must take the next step,” was espoused by Pablo Casals, the Spanish cellist (Adams, 2004). For many involved in the asylum seeker rights movement in Australia – non-government organisations, church groups, activist groups, academics and individuals (Gosden, 2006) – it summed up how they felt with the increasingly punitive and harsh government policy of recent years. While there seemed for many that there was no light at the end of the tunnel, to simply give up the fight was untenable. In this article, we reflect on the involvement of academics in this movement by documenting a collective action that was driven by the four authors of this article. We identify ourselves as both academics and asylum seeker advocates. This action was an open letter signed by 204 academics, from a range of disciplines, who specialise in the

refugee and asylum seeker research area. The letter raised concerns about the policy of mandatory detention, which allows for asylum seekers who arrive to Australia by boat to be held in immigration detention facilities while their protection claims are processed. The letter also raised concerns regarding the policies proposed by the major political parties in mid-2012 aimed to stem the arrival of further boats of asylum seekers such as turning back the boats to Indonesia, re-opening detention centres on Nauru and Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island, the Malaysian Solution and the re-introduction of temporary protection visas.

Despite the noteworthy number of academic signatories to the open letter, the question of whether academics have the responsibility to use the freedoms bestowed on them to voice their concerns about social

injustices remains a contentious issue (Cancian, 1993; Flood, Martin, & Dreher, 2013; Martin, 1984). This is particularly so within mainstream psychology. In the first part of this paper, we draw on the foundations of community psychology to argue that academics that bear witness to the negative impact of asylum seeker policy have an ethical responsibility to engage in social actions outside of academia in response to what they witness. We also argue that this responsibility should be coupled with a reflection on the impacts of such social action (Freire, 1972). As such, in the second part of this paper, we critically reflect on the outcomes of the open letter action as part of bearing witness and consider why members of the asylum seeker rights movement keep going on in the face of very challenging political circumstances. First, we provide a brief overview of the socio-political context in which the academic open letter was born.

### **Australia's Asylum Seeker Policy Debate**

Australia has long demonstrated a preoccupation towards controlling its borders to deter the entry of those deemed as 'other'; particularly refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>1</sup> This discourse reflects what Devetak (2004) refers to as a culture of deterrence and is premised on the assumption that there are 'legitimate refugees' who enter Australia via the official offshore resettlement programme, and 'illegitimate refugees' who arrive to Australia by boat without authorisation and then apply for asylum. This dichotomy between legitimate and illegitimate is, however, objectively incorrect. Being a signatory to the United Nations (UN) Refugee Convention, Australia is obliged to process asylum seekers' claims and to offer them refugee status if their claims have been verified, regardless of how they arrive in Australia (Crock, Saul, & Dastyari, 2006).

Despite Australia's obligations under the UN Refugee Convention, mandatory detention for asylum seekers arriving without a valid

visa was enshrined in legislation in 1992 by the Labor Government. Between 1996 and 2007, under the Coalition Government, further policies designed to deter and punish the arrival of asylum seekers by boat (who do not have valid visas upon arrival) were adopted and received mostly bipartisan support. These included the excision of Australian islands surrounding the mainland for immigration purposes, the establishment of detention centres in remote locations within Australia, and offshore on Nauru and Manus Island (known as the Pacific Solution), and the introduction of temporary protection visas to all asylum seekers who could access Australia's refugee protection procedures and were found to be refugees (Crock et al., 2006). By the time of the 2007 federal election, there was opposition within some sections of the Australian and international communities to these policies and the Labor Party adopted a National Platform that included a call for asylum seeker policies that were more humane (Fleay, 2010). Soon after the election, the new (Labor Party) Minister for Immigration announced that immigration detention would be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time and that children would not be placed in a detention centre (Evans, 2008). However, as increasing (albeit small) numbers of boats of asylum seekers began to reach Australian shores, it was not long until the Labor Government began to abandon its commitment to more humane asylum seeker policies.

By mid-2012, as numbers of boat arrivals of asylum seekers to Australia continued to increase, both major political parties argued for solutions that would stop asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat. While differing in content, five deterrent policy proposals were put forward by the Labor and Liberal parties. The policies proposed aroused significant alarm to those concerned about asylum seeker rights, who argued that the policies would not deter boat

arrivals, largely because they did not address the reasons why asylum seekers flee in the first place, and that they ignored both the right of asylum seekers to seek protection under international and domestic law and the harm the policies might cause already vulnerable people.

### **Five Deterrent Policy Proposals**

The first of the deterrent policies reaffirmed by both parties was mandatory detention. For many asylum seekers, this has meant years in immigration detention and has had profound negative effects on their psychological health (Coffey, Kaplan, Sampson, & Tucci, 2010; Hartley & Fleay, 2012; Silove, Phillips, & Steel, 2010). While the Labor Government enabled, since late 2012, the release of many asylum seekers from immigration detention facilities before their protection claims were finalised, this remains at the discretion of the Minister for Immigration, and mandatory detention remains enshrined in legislation. In addition, the Liberal Party proposed the re-opening of the detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island, arguing that they had acted as a deterrent during the Howard Government's term in office between 1996 and 2007. While the number of boat arrivals declined markedly by the end of the Coalition Government's terms in office, the causes of this remain complex and contested.

For example, Hoffman (2010) argues that the factors responsible for stopping unauthorised boat arrivals in 2001 were separate from those that explain why there were so few such arrivals between 2001 and 2008. She suggests that the arrest in the second half of 2001 of certain key individuals involved in smuggling syndicates is often overlooked in this debate. Further, of the 1,322 asylum seekers who were detained on Nauru under the Howard government, some for a number of years, 573 were eventually resettled in Australia and 274 were resettled in other countries, all either as refugees or on other

humanitarian grounds, and 474 were returned to their countries of origin, mostly to Afghanistan, and many fled again soon after they arrived as it was still unsafe for them (Southern, 2011). Some of these asylum seekers have since returned to Australia and have now been accepted as refugees (Fleay, 2012). Evidence is also clear that asylum seekers (including many children) are being harmed psychologically, particularly when they spend a long time in offshore facilities (Briskman, Latham, & Goddard, 2008).

In May 2011, the Labor Party proposed an alternative offshore solution that became known as the Malaysian Solution. This policy would allow for asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat to be swapped with asylum seekers in Malaysia. However, Malaysia is not a party to the UN Refugee Convention and does not protect the rights of refugees in practice. For example, refugees have no guarantee that they will not be returned to their countries of origin where they would be at risk of further persecution. If Australia sends asylum seekers to Malaysia without first assessing their refugee claims, it may breach the core prohibitions against *refoulement* in the UN Refugee Convention and the UN Convention against Torture.

Another deterrent policy that was proposed by the Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott in September 2011 was returning the boats of asylum seekers to Indonesia. While the Coalition Government attempted to turn back boats of asylum seekers to Indonesia in 2001, there is evidence to suggest that it was dangerous for both asylum seekers and Australian Navy personnel. Many lives were put at risk; for example, according to a *Four Corners* report, when SIEV 7 was returned to Indonesian waters in 2001, three men disappeared, presumed drowned, while trying to swim ashore from their stricken boat (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2002). Furthermore, Indonesia has indicated that it will not accept the towing back of asylum seeker boats to its shores and former Defence



Force chief Admiral Chris Barrie has serious reservations about the proposed policy (Allard & Needham, 2012).

The fifth deterrent policy proposed was again proposed by the Liberal Party – the reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs). The Coalition Government granted temporary visas to all asylum seekers who could access Australia's refugee protection procedures and were found to be refugees, and denied these asylum seekers the right to apply for family reunion. Rather than deterring other asylum seekers from taking boat journeys to Australia, evidence indicates that these visas encouraged many women and children to do so. For example, most of the 353 asylum seekers who died in 2001 when the vessel SIEV X sank en route to Australia were women and children, many of who had husbands or fathers on temporary protection visas in Australia (Hoffman, 2008). Research also highlights the negative mental health consequences for refugees who were granted TPVs (Momartin, Steel, Coello, Aroche, Silove, & Brooks, 2006).

In the midst of the political debate about what policies would best deter boat arrivals, coupled with growing concerns about the number of asylum seekers losing their lives on boat journeys to Australia, on 28 June 2012 then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen announced that the Australian Government had invited Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston AC AFC, the former chief of Australia's defence force, to lead an expert panel on Australian responses to asylum seekers. The panel was tasked with making policy recommendations to the Australian Government that would prevent asylum seekers risking their lives on dangerous boat journeys to Australia. The expert panel also included Paris Aristotle AM, the Director of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Professor Michael L'Estrange AO, the Director of the National Security College at the Australian National University, and

invited public submissions.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Academic Responsibility to Undertake Social Action as Part of Bearing Witness**

The expert panel's call for submissions prompted the four authors to write the academics' open letter and 204 academics researching in the area of refugee and asylum seekers became signatories to the letter. However, whether academics have the responsibility to use the freedoms granted to undertake actions regarding social injustice has been much debated. This remains particularly the case within the broad discipline of psychology.

On the one hand, mainstream psychology has long been criticised for not taking a firm political or moral stand in socio-political struggles (Scherer, 1993). This can be understood, in part, due to mainstream psychology's positivist epistemological underpinnings that assert that 'valid' knowledge can only be found through observable data; that interpretation of such data should be objective and quantifiable and that academic statements should be value-free and separate from science. Similar arguments have been made with regards to science and social science more generally in that 'valid' research avoids implicating policy and policy dimensions (Flood et al., 2013). Thus, attempts by psychologists, and academics more generally, to engage in actions to try and foster social change is viewed by some as academically *irresponsible* and, indeed, unscholarly. Sub-specialities such as community and critical psychology, however, emerged to challenge the professional and scientific norms that excluded values and social change principles from psychology (Prilleltensky, 2001). Community psychology, for example, highlights the ethical imperative that research and practice are dedicated to "the elimination of oppressive social conditions conducive to problems with living" (Prilleltensky, 2001, p. 750). This understanding of academic

practice is consistent with an understanding of social research that gives rise to “an obligation to assist in redressing social problems, wherever possible” (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007, p. 310). The emerging field of Peace Psychology has similar underpinnings regarding the need for a link between research, social justice and social action (Bornstein & Prior, 2012).

Community psychology elevates the importance of recognising the role that personal values play in guiding research and action (Prilleltensky, 2001; Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997). From our personal position, our understanding of academic practice, in the most part, comes from our dual identities as academics and advocates/activists. Indeed, our research into immigration detention in Australia has followed our advocacy and activism in relation to this system. That is, we first started visiting detention centres not as researchers but as individuals concerned about the system. But as we witnessed the systemic abuse within immigration detention in Australia, we began to focus our research efforts on the system. In our visiting of detention centres we have met many asylum seekers and refugees who have been subjected to punitive government policies, including mandatory detention, the Pacific Solution, and TPVs. In this capacity, we have witnessed the deleterious impact of such policies and we have carried this concern into academic life. Thus, our advocacy/activism in the area informs our research and vice versa. This is a view of academic practice where we conduct activism/advocacy *as* academic work.

Although we are an interdisciplinary team (authors one and two come from community/social psychology background; author three from a politics and international relations background and author four from a sociology background), what brings us together is our common understanding that what we are doing is bearing witness. We see ourselves as part of the broader asylum seeker rights movement in our research efforts to bear

witness and help to give at least some voice to asylum seekers’ experiences.

This is an understanding of academic practice that combines witnessing abuse with a responsibility to take action (Fine, 2006; Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011). Bearing witness involves listening to and observing the experiences of another, followed by taking action in response (Cody, 2001):

Witnessing has both personal and political consequences for those who are unable to enjoy human rights. Firstly, it reassures such persons that they have not been abandoned. Secondly, witnessing acts as testimony from which action can begin (Zion, Briskman, & Loff, 2012, p. 73).

Thus to witness an abuse means to become responsible for taking some form of action in response (Peters, 2001).

We argue that the ethical imperative to bear witness is elevated for asylum seeker policy, most specifically because often asylum seekers are removed from public view within the bounds of immigration detention centres. This is particularly so for those detained in remote locations, and those offshore on Nauru and Manus Island. The length of detention that is endured by many of the men, women and children in immigration facilities, and the arbitrary nature of this detention, breaches a range of international human rights conventions ratified by Australia including the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention Against Torture, the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Refugee Convention. In detention, asylum seekers often become nameless and voiceless and their ability to exert influence on the system that detains them is minimal. While it is important for researchers to respect the resilience and agency of asylum seekers (Fiske, 2012), it is also necessary to

appreciate the impacts of the detention situation on the capacities of asylum seekers for autonomy (Mackenzie et al., 2007). For those in detention, their autonomy is extremely limited by the system. Bearing witness research offers a means for the concerns of asylum seekers to be voiced in the public domain. In doing so, bearing witness research can provide a form of agency to asylum seekers in detention.

Engaging in social actions on the basis of bearing witness holds a number of challenges, both professionally and ethically (Fine, 2006; Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Flood et al. (2013), for example, outline a number of challenges involved in marrying academia and activism including threats to academic advancement and output expectations. From an ethical perspective, we also become an active witness. Choices are made to bear witness in a particular way and place and, thus, inevitably choices are made to not bear witness in other ways or places (Cody, 2001). This raises important questions about whose experiences are elevated in our choices of bearing witness and whose remain hidden.

In addition, issues of power in the act of bearing witness should be acknowledged. In line with the principles of community psychology, bearing witness researchers are not 'objective' observers but become involved in the lives of the 'participants'. Relationships of friendship often develop through regular visits to detention centres. While this may allow the researcher to gain a keener understanding of the lived experiences of asylum seekers, it can be accompanied with complex power relationships between researchers and asylum seekers. In a similar way that feminists call for research reflexivity (Reinharz, 1992), researchers who bear witness should reflect upon the impact of their own personal history, values, and social status (i.e., one's position in society based on factors such as occupation) on the research itself and on relationships between researchers and participants. For example, our identity as

"white, western researchers...and the impact that this has on the research relationship" needs to be considered (Hugman et al., 2011, pp. 1283-1284). Our membership of the dominant white community in Australia and university employment may provide us with a high level of social status among those detained. All of these factors contribute to an inevitable imbalance of power between us as advocates/researchers, and asylum seekers.

However, while not detracting from the importance of considering and attending to the ethics of bearing witness, we argue that there is a much greater imbalance of power between asylum seekers and those ultimately responsible for their detention, the Australian Government. We argue that to *not* act would mean being complicit with moral wrong and harm created by the policy of mandatory detention.

### **Social Action based on Bearing Witness**

There are a host of actions that academics, advocates and activists who bear witness to the effects of government policy on asylum seekers have taken, such as engaging with the media, writing opinion pieces, talking to government officials, and engaging in direct action such as protesting. These are all actions that we have been, and continue to be, involved in. However, we focus here on the academics' open letter.

At the beginning of July 2012, we began drafting the open letter setting out four major concerns about the proposed policies put forward by the two major parties and proposing five alternative suggestions. Once we had completed a draft, we sent it to four other people for critical review (two lawyers, one psychology academic, and one human rights academic) for their input. Upon the letter's completion, we sent it to approximately 60 research experts in the asylum seeker field (see Pedersen, Fleay, Hoffman, & Hartley, 2012, for the three-page letter). If they were interested in signing the letter, they were directed to a website where

they could give their names and affiliations (see Appendix for the cover letter and instructions). Given that we are an interdisciplinary team we had quite different contacts. We gave a cut-off of four days because the Expert Panel was already sitting but because signatures were still coming in, we extended it to six days. We used no arguments for people to sign the letter; we let the letter speak for itself. At least some of the original academics we sent the letter to forwarded it to other academics working in the refugee/asylum seeker field. Only academics who gave their full names and affiliations were included in the final count.

### **The Outcomes of Social Action based on Bearing Witness**

While we argue that academics who bear witness to the deleterious effect of government policy on asylum seeker have an ethical responsibility to engage in social action, from a community psychology perspective it is also imperative that action is coupled with reflection (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). For example, Freire (1972) regards reflection without action as armchair revolution and action without reflection as action for action's sake. However, when action and reflection are combined, 'they constantly and mutually illuminate each other' (Freire, 1972, p. 149). In this section of the paper, we reflect on the outcomes of the open letter. While the expression of the social justice concerns of academics via public letters is certainly not new, what is less common is for such action to be coupled with a critical reflection of the act and its outcomes.

Community psychological theory offers a number of useful frameworks to conceptualise the impact of engaging in social actions at a number of levels. Ecological levels of analysis, such as those proposed by Kelly (1966), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Dalton, Elias, and Wandersman (2001), while differing in content and emphasis, can also be used to understand the ways in which settings and

individuals are interrelated. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Dalton et al. (2007) propose, people need to be understood within the environments or systems in which they are entrenched. Specifically, Dalton et al. notes that individuals can be affected by microsystems (such as classrooms, choirs, families, friends, self-help groups, and teams), organisations (for example, community coalitions, local business or labour groups, schools, religious congregations, and workplaces), localities (such as cities, neighbourhoods, rural areas, and towns), and macrosystems (including the media, and politics).

The ecological framework is useful as it enables one to undertake a critical engagement of the consequences of taking action, not only in terms of personal outcomes for individuals but also in the broader social system. As such, we use this framework to direct our critique of the impact of the open letter. However, it is important to note that some scholars have argued that actions focused on microsystem levels of the ecology do not adequately address the macro or structural level of oppression (e.g., Gesten & Jason, 1987; Moane, 2003). In the context of asylum seeker policy in Australia, the impact of action at the microsystem level cannot be underestimated, particularly for asylum seekers who are subjected to government policy (see for example, Pedersen, Kenny, Briskman, & Hoffman, 2008; Pedersen, Fozdar, & Kenny, 2012). But it is in the macro context that responsibilities lie for what we view as harmful asylum seeker policies. Ultimately, long-term changes in the macrosystem are needed in order for the rights of asylum seekers to be promoted and protected. With this in mind, we reflect on the impact of the letter at a number of levels.

### ***Macrosystem Level Outcomes***

At the macrosystem level, the academic open letter, as well as other letters and submissions sent to the Expert Panel,

appeared to have little effect in influencing policy in what we would view as an overall positive direction, as we outline below. The Expert Panel received over 500 written submissions addressing its terms of reference and consulted with parliamentarians, government and non-government experts in this area. The panel published its report on 13 August 2012 (see Houston, Aristotle, & L'Estrange, 2012). The Australian Government has endorsed in principle each of the 22 recommendations contained in the report, and has since taken steps to implement some of the recommendations. Interestingly, a number of the recommendations in the Expert Report were similar to the ones we proposed (these include proposals two, three and five as outlined in the open letter). The first recommendation in the report included first pursuing legislative amendments to allow for the transfer of asylum seekers who arrive to Australia by boat from 13 August 2012 to third countries for the processing of their claims for protection. This was followed by an announcement that Australia would double Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Programme numbers from 13,750 per year to 20,000 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012). As at April 2013, there are more than 400 men detained on Nauru, and over 200 men, women and children detained on Manus Island, with little indication of when their protection claims will be finalised, nor where they will be allowed to resettle should they be recognised as refugees. Over 13,500 other asylum seekers who have arrived by boat to Australia since 13 August 2012 have remained in Australian detention centres or have been released into the Australian community with minimal social welfare supports and no right to work.

These changes have reinforced the false dichotomy between legitimate and illegitimate refugees, with the latter being punished for their mode of arrival. A number of key human rights organisations have condemned Australia's offshore processing policy,

including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Hall, 2012) and the Australian Human Rights Commission (2012). Despite bipartisan support for such deterrent-based policies, there have also been some outspoken politicians. In an impassioned address to the House of Representatives on November 28 2012, Judi Moylan Liberal MP (2012) stated that these changes reflect a "cunning suite of legislation and international agreements devised by government to effectively avoid Australia's obligations under the refugee convention" (p. 78). Thus, at a broader policy level, academic social action appeared to have little effect in implementing overall change. However, a number of politicians and media outlets did make reference to the letter, suggesting that it at least made some impression on actors within the macrosystem level. The most compelling political response was from The Greens who argued that academic opinion supported their opposition to offshore processing. Citing the open letter, Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young stated that instead of offshore processing, the Federal Government should almost double the refugee intake to 25,000 a year and increase funding for asylum seekers to be processed in Malaysia and Indonesia (Bachelard & Taylor, 2012). In contrast, the Immigration Minister, Chris Bowen, is reported to have responded to the open letter by saying that the "idea that we can increase our refugee intake without any attempt at deterrence is simply unrealistic and naive" (Bachelard & Taylor, 2012).

The open letter was also noticed by a far-right political party, the Australian Protectionist Party (APP). Members in this party appear to be deeply disturbed by the open letter. For example, one person commented on their website that "someone needs to operate an online database with people like Professor Anne Pedersen on it, so when the times right (sic) we can round them up and charge them with sedition and/or treason" (APP, 2012). Another unnamed

person said “If Australia is to take in refugees, we should look at taking in the more culturally compatible people from the formerly prosperous South Africa, where Boer farmers are suffering a process of genocide” (APP, 2012). Clearly, the open letter made an impression on some of the people involved in this political party. On face-value, this negative reaction may be interpreted as a negative outcome. Alternatively, the strong responses from this far right-wing political party are another indicator that our concerns were heard.

In addition, there were a number of media reports that included discussion of the open letter, published in WA Today, the Campus Review, The Fremantle Herald, the Sydney Morning Herald, Crikey, The Age, The Green’s media release, and UNIS Australia University News and Information Service (see Trenwith, 2012, for example). Two of the authors also conducted radio interviews about the open letter. This media interest is another indicator that the open letter had made an impression on a broader audience than just the letter’s signatories, and helped to increase awareness within actors in the macrosystem level as well as the general public regarding policy options that would address the needs of asylum seekers.

Of course, the open letter, or social action in general, should not be understood in isolation; it is embedded in a history, social and political context, and within a movement where many are working to create political change. As we elaborate on below, collective actions like the open letter may not create overall political change in isolation, but they may make a contribution to broader efforts to do so. They are also important to make a public record for the fact that a collective of academics researching in refugee and asylum seeker area were in accord that they did not agree with the government’s policy proposals.

#### ***Organisational Level Outcomes***

If one conceptualises social movements such as the asylum seeker rights movement as

a broad organisation, at an organisational level, we observed some positive flow-on effects from the open letter. Most particularly was the crystallisation of academic-advocate networks within the asylum seeker rights movement. One academic noted to the second author that “things could have been much worse if it wasn’t for the letter”. Although it is not articulated in what ways it could have been worse, in a sense it did not appear to matter. In this instance, taking action – even with little political impact – was regarded as efficacious in and of itself. Another group, ‘Academics and Advocates’, was set up in an attempt to better link academics who are researching in the area of asylum seeker and refugee rights with other advocates. The founder of this group noted “this is largely inspired by your efforts at getting so many academics to sign onto the submission to the Panel”. This second group is now working cohesively to challenge Government policy.

This feedback suggests to us that the open letter was important, at least in some small way, to building momentum within the academic community to engage with other actors, and to further engage in social actions expressing opposition to more restrictive policy developments. This observation supports insights from sociology (e.g., role theory, see Ebaugh, 1988), political sciences (e.g., public opinion theory, see Wilson, 1962), and social psychology (e.g., system justification theory, see Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003; social representation theory, see Moscovici, 1988; see also Hartley, 2010) that all point to the role of consensus at the broader societal level in shaping individual and social behaviour. The common thread across this literature is that the degree of consensus within a given relevant context (whether it be ‘real’ or perceived) has implications for whether or not someone is likely to engage in group-based actions and be motivated to continue to take action. Thus, actions such as the open letter, where there is a collective voice of a

segment of a social movement expressing concerns, can help to build consensus within the academic realm and encourage an experience of motivation for continued engagement. Indeed, Flood et al. (2013) discuss the importance of collegial support when engaging in activist work as academics, particularly the support offered by colleagues who are involved in the same kind of work. Thus, collective actions such as signing a letter may increase feelings of solidarity and perceptions of consensus, and cannot be underestimated as a form of social action.

Second, from a social movement point of view, social action cannot be viewed as a task where there is a defined start, duration and finish; it is a process. Action around particular issues only ends when the goals have been achieved, when a change at the macrosystem level has been achieved, and even then there is a role for advocates and activists, including academics, to monitor the situation and to reinstate activities should the situation deteriorate. Many barriers will be placed before those striving to create social change because there are others who strive to maintain the status quo, and social change can be very slow. One need only consider the release from house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and the gains the social movement that mobilised around calls for democracy in Burma have recently made to see the importance of measured endurance in the activism process. While there remain significant human rights concerns within Burma, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and the unbanning of the National League for Democracy, seemed distant developments until the last few years. Similarly in the Australian context, the Australian Psychological Society lobbied the Federal Government and the Australian Medical Association for decades to have Psychology recognised under the Medicare scheme. It took about 30 years, but their efforts were rewarded in October 2006 when psychologists nationwide could finally offer their clients

Medicare rebates. Thus, the advocates and activists need to keep working towards social change even when the situation seems hopeless; it may not stay this way.

Finally, while the open letter was met with positivity by other academics involved in the social movement and by academia broadly, academics engaged in activist work can face a number of challenges from within academia, including attacks, threats to security and advancement, output expectations, and disciplinary and epistemological pressures (see Flood et al., 2013). In line with community psychology principles (Prilleltensky, 2001), we reject the notion that research can and should be inherently objective, a position in clear contrast to mainstream psychology. Given this, future research might explore how advocates of more positivist empirical psychology approaches view social actions like the open letter and whether type of action/research is perceived as valuable and/or useful. A consideration of whether objective research is possible at all in this area would also be a useful issue to engage with further.

#### ***Microsystem Level Outcomes***

Responses to the letter at the microsystem level, such as from community members were mixed. Author two received a number of personal emails and comments, some of which were positive. However, what was noteworthy were members of the public criticising the role of academics in political debates. One individual wrote as a commentary on the open letter:

It is my view that if Anne Pedersen and her fellow signatories feel strongly enough that the government is violating human rights that they put their money where there (sic) mouth is and utilise the courts to mount a legal challenge. Failing that perhaps the ballot box is calling. In fact a political career may be a

more appropriate location for Anne Pedersen to espouse political views and one in which she would not rely on the thinly veiled guise of academia to attain an audience.

Thus this member of the general public considers that the academic voice does not belong in political debate – reflecting the positivist assumption that academic research and political action should remain separate.

A very important aspect to consider, however, is the impact of the open letter on asylum seekers themselves. Some asylum seekers and refugees known to the authors were aware of the open letter, as well as other forms of social action we have participated in. Indeed, some refugees put newspaper reports on their Facebook page in solidarity with the academics. Our actions emerged from the advocacy role we have taken on behalf of many individual asylum seekers over the past 12 years. Comments from asylum seekers over this time indicate the important role that such advocacy plays in communicating that at least some Australians consider many of the asylum seeker policies of Australia to be inhumane. As Zion et al. (2012) argue, this advocacy “reassures such persons they have not been abandoned” (p. 73). Public actions such as the open letter further reinforce to asylum seekers that they have allies in their struggle for asylum.

It is clear that asylum seekers have extremely limited opportunities to speak for themselves, to tell the public their stories and to make known the inhumane conditions in detention and bearing witness can offer an avenue to elevate the concerns of asylum seekers. Through the process of bearing witness there are also important ways in which researchers/advocates can facilitate asylum seekers to utilise their expertise within the severe constraints of the system. For example, it is essential to ask asylum seekers whether and in what ways they might like their stories shared. It is also important to link asylum seekers with ways in which they themselves

can advocate for themselves while in detention (e.g., discuss their situation with their case manager, write a letter to the Ombudsman).

**Final Reflection: ‘The situation is hopeless; we must take the next step’**

At the macro level, it might be easy to conclude that the overall outcome of the expert panel submission process, and the academic open letter, was a failure. The policies and legislations implemented since the expert panel report report’s release undermine a number of Australia’s human rights obligations and further punish asylum seekers by their mode of arrival. Yet, we saw at the different ecological levels the importance of the open letter and the impact of this action – such as a crystallisation of both support and opposition for the cause, and for elevating asylum seekers’ voices in the political arena. In addition, the social actions undertaken by academics can be considered as part of the larger social movement that has mobilised in Australia around the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Academics and others in this movement have consistently applied pressure on the government to review and improve refugee policy and to provide better treatment to asylum seekers and refugees. Actors in the movement have sought to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees have been kept in the public spotlight and the conscience of the Australian population has been repeatedly nudged to consider the justice and treatment afforded asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. Finally, it is interesting to reflect on the tension between community psychology’s rejection of the ‘expert model’ of knowledge, and the academic letter, which could be argued to function within an ‘expert’ model by the very act of inviting only academics who research in the asylum seeker and refugee field. However, as we have argued in this paper, bearing witness to the effect of government policy for asylum



seekers is still the domain of the relatively few and academic involvement in elevating the experiences of asylum seekers is a way of providing increased transparency within the immigration system. This is particularly so given the extremely limited monitoring mechanisms that are in place in Australia to provide oversight of the immigration detention system, which is now even more of a concern with detention centres once again on Nauru and Manus Island, outside of Australia's jurisdiction. The extreme difficulties in shifting asylum seeker policy, coupled with the limited opportunities asylum seekers have to speak out for themselves, makes the ethical imperative for academics to bear witness even more salient. Alongside all of those working tirelessly for the rights of asylum seekers in Australia, it is essential for academics in the field to continue to 'take the next step' to help ensure the voices of asylum seekers are elevated in public and political debate, despite any feelings that the situation is hopeless.<sup>3</sup>

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> The term "refugee" is used here to refer to individuals whose refugee status has been recognised in Australia. The term "asylum seeker" is used to refer to individuals whose refugee status is still being determined.

<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the Coalition Government's election in September, 2013, further policies aiming to deter the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia by boat have been announced. Some of these will increase the number of asylum seekers who will experience long-term detention. In particular, the capacities of the sites of detention on Nauru and Manus Island are to be expanded to accommodate a further 3,230 asylum seekers who arrive to Australia by boat in addition to the 1,566 asylum seekers detained on the islands as at the end of September 2013 (Maley & Wilson, 2013). For asylum seekers who have already been released into community-based arrangements in Australia, there continues to be uncertainty

over how and when their protection claim will be processed and the prospect of being granted a TPV should their claim be accepted. Given the large number of claims that will now need to be assessed, it is very likely that many of these asylum seekers will remain on bridging visas without the right to work for months, if not several years, and will have the additional stress of the prospects of being given a temporary visa.

<sup>3</sup> In view of the policies implemented since the Coalition Government's election in September 2013 now more than ever, academics, advocates and activists need "to take the next step".

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### Appendix

We are refugee advocates and academics working in the field of asylum seekers. We are becoming increasingly alarmed about the politics which are playing out about asylum seekers. As you may know, there is an Expert Panel led by Angus Houston that the government has tasked with providing a report about the best way forward in dealing with asylum seeker issues; public submissions are being called for. There are also a number of concerned MPs who are meeting over the winter parliamentary recess to discuss this issue.

We would like to contribute to these deliberations and, to this end, we have put together an open letter outlining our concerns about issues such as turning back the boats, Nauru, the Malaysian Solution and temporary protection visas. We have also included recommendations that are focused on the needs of asylum seekers. As well as giving to the letter to the Expert Panel, we will also send it to some politicians.

If you agree with the content of the letter, and would like to put your name to it as an academic working in this field, please do so. You can do this by going to the web link: <http://scored.murdoch.edu.au:8008/survey/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=8232982>

Could you please note your professional title, name and affiliation? For example, "Associate Professor Anne Pedersen, Murdoch University".

We don't have much time so we will shut down this web site at 5pm, Perth time, on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> July.

We would also be very grateful if you could forward the link to any other academics working in the asylum-seeker field who may be interested.

Thanks very much, Anne Pedersen and Caroline Fleay

## **Food insecurity and urban poverty in New Zealand: A scholar-activist engagement**

Alex McConville

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*There is little in-depth knowledge as to what inhibits impoverished families from obtaining sufficient food to eat healthily. This discussion paper provides an overview of the social and policy circumstances that create and maintain food poverty in New Zealand. We attempt to locate some answers to this issue by engaging scholars and practitioners working alongside families with on-going food insecurity. A qualitative meta-analysis comprising a comprehensive literature review was conducted alongside key informant interviews with experienced scholar-activists to contribute to the development of a more in-depth understanding of this complex social issue. We contend that food insecurity and urban poverty are troubling realities for many families in New Zealand and are exacerbated by structural constraints. We argue, as current and future psychologists engaging in concerns critical to community wellbeing, we need to situate our work within local socio-political contexts.*

While we find ourselves situated in a world that produces enough food to feed every man, woman and child sufficiently (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 1996), we simultaneously find ourselves located in a system that fails to ensure it is realised. This is not a condition limited to the developing world. Certainly, in New Zealand – a country abundant in food choices – many thousands of families struggle to satisfy this need (Wynd, 2005). Food and nutrition have long been recognised as critical to health; in recent years their contribution to health inequalities in wealthy, industrialised countries has been more widely acknowledged and better characterised (Dowler & O'Connor, 2011). However, in terms of the way policy-makers understand and respond to such inequalities and the varying ways in which they often fail to relate economic and social conditions to food and nutrition experiences remains contested (Dowler & O'Connor, 2011). This discussion paper responds to calls from Indigenous and community psychologists to move beyond the individual level of analysis by attending to the historical, political and socio-economic contexts in which peoples' lives are embedded (Groot, Rua, Masters-Awatere,

Dudgeon, & Garvey, 2012).

To gain an appreciation of factors impacting on the lives of those who are food insecure, we explore scholarly literature, media items, and not-for-profit organisations and government reports pertaining to community health inequalities that create situations of food insecurity and are exacerbated by urban poverty. This qualitative meta-analysis (Paterson & Canam, 2001) is crucial when attempting to conceptualise food insecurity for impoverished families as one must acknowledge and assess the complex interplay of various socio-political factors. Further, this level of analysis allows us to piece together the varying discourses in New Zealand around poverty and food insecurity. Families struggling to feed themselves are not entirely in control of their situation as the decisions affecting their lives are routinely made over and above them by people entirely removed from their lifeworlds (Groot, 2010). It is through cooperative action and advocacy that we, as critical community psychologists, seek to close societal divides and establish greater opportunities for marginalised peoples. This position echoes Martín-Baró's (1994) definition of liberation psychology as

“a paradigm in which theories don’t define the problems of the situation; rather, the problems demand or select their own theorization” (p. 314).

The individualistic tendencies in positive-orientated psychologies have been criticised for leading to the promotion of self-absorption and narcissism (Becker & Marecek, 2008) by claiming that through personal effort the individual can transcend their material, economic, and social circumstances. This approach can obscure the impact of inequitable social structures on causing food insecurity, further entrenching people within conditions of poverty (Hodgetts, Sonn, Curtis, Nikora, & Drew, 2010). In moving to adjust the focus from individual problems associated with ‘poor people’, this paper seeks to contribute to broader scholar-activists efforts to understand and address the structural impacts of poverty in New Zealand. For example, researchers have documented for the past decade systemic exclusions in housing policy for impoverished urban populations (Kearns, Smith, & Abbott, 1991; Cheer, Kearns, & Murphy, 2001); food poverty for rural populations (Carne & Mancini, 2012), the overrepresentation of Indigenous and racialised minority groups in homelessness and poverty (Groot et al., 2012; Cheer et al., 2001); and health inequalities for homeless people and poor households (Hodgetts, Stolte, Nikora, & Groot, 2012; Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Tankel, & Groot, 2013).

In line with the scholar-activist tradition (Murray, 2012) this paper challenges psychology to extend its focus to challenge the broader structural constraints explicitly implicated in communities. First, we consider urban poverty as a key driver in food security. Second, we deconstruct dominant ideologies surrounding food insecurity. Third, we outline our methodology for scholar-activism. Fourth, our analysis investigates polarising dichotomies between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. Fifth, we explore the

limited agentic strategies available to families for obtaining food within systemically constrained lifeworlds. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the importance of advocacy for communities experiencing food insecurity.

### ***Food Insecurity and Urban Poverty***

Urban poverty has been identified by the World Health Organisation ([WHO], 2010) as the most pressing public health concern today and it is socio-economic status that is argued to be the greatest driver in the extent to which food insecurity becomes a lived reality (Wynd, 2005). Food insecurity broadly refers to the degree in which the ability to access adequate, nutritious, and affordable food becomes compromised or constrained (Carter, Kruse, Blakey, & Collings, 2011; Gareau, 2004). In New Zealand, poverty has grown 2.5 times faster than the Organisation of European Co-operation and Development (OECD) annual average (1%) over the last few decades (Ministry of Social Development, 2006; OECD, 2011, 2012). The top 10% of income earners had annual increases of 2.5% whereas the bottom 10% had increases of 1.1%. This causes a stretch effect or increased inequity, with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Māori and Pasifika peoples are overrepresented in the bottom 10% (Hodgetts et al., 2013).

In New Zealand, Māori and Pasifika peoples bear the harshest consequences of recessions and poverty. They are more likely to live in areas of deprivation where access to nutritious foods and quality supermarkets are limited and supply of fast food is abundant (Bidwell, 2009). The arrangement of a typical urban, and more specifically socially deprived urban environment, is one in which corporations have extensive geographical and spatial influence so as to encourage calorie dense, nutritionally poor eating habits which are often less costly than healthier options (Caraher & Coveney, 2004; Drewnowski, Monsivais, Maillot, & Darmon, 2007).

The majority of people who come to be

food insecure and in need of assistance are beneficiaries. Low paid workers are also increasingly becoming food insecure likely due to rising rental costs which often overtake incomes (Wynd, 2005). Research suggests that families with limited capacity to save money are five times more likely to be food insecure than households that have the capacity to save (Nolan, Williams, Rikard-Bell, & Mohsin, 2006). Furthermore, low incomes often lead to increased debt, and people who experience food insecurity typically face high levels of debt alongside gambling problems, or living with others who gamble (Wynd, 2005). It is of no coincidence then, that vulnerable communities and areas of urban deprivation are more likely to have significantly higher concentrations of gaming machines (Francis Group, 2009).

Being food insecure can lead to increased psychological distress (Carter et al., 2011), and poorer overall health compared to those who are food secure (Temple, 2008). For example, Molcho, Gabhainn, Kelly, Friel, and Kelleher (2006) found that food insecure children were significantly more likely to experience an increase in mental and somatic symptoms. Food insecurity can also lead to increasing rates of obesity (Drewnowski & Specter, 2004). While this may seem counter intuitive, people forced to 'choose' between high cost, high quality, nutrient rich foods or low cost, low quality, nutrient poor, energy-dense foods, are more likely to purchase the latter due to issues of affordability.

Socio-economic deprivation also has direct links with other factors related to food insecurity such as limited access to transport, limited ability to acquire adequate storage facilities, lack of time to shop for, prepare, and cook food, and a lack of means to buy food in bulk (Nolan et al., 2006). For instance, families that earn on or around minimum wage, working multiple jobs, and spending significantly longer hours during a

typical working week in order to cover basic living costs, will by proxy have less time to engage in food secure practices and may have less means to afford adequate storage, such as quality refrigeration.

### ***Framing Food Insecurity***

While current public discourse guiding government responses revolves around the idea that people in urban poverty have merely made 'poor choices' (Trevett, 2011), or seek to 'live the dream' of a government subsidised life (Hartevelt, 2010), the reality is far more complex. Such positions are cemented in an ideology of individual responsibility that neglects the broader structural implications played out in personal lifeworlds (Birn, 2009). We must acknowledge and include the extent to which socio-economic status, environmental and historical contexts contain deep and inextricable constraints that contribute to structure and direct many facets of the lifeworlds of people in urban poverty.

The political landscape is such that structural decisions are often made which benefit some and fail others. When said decisions render those who already find themselves situated in socio-economically fragile conditions worse off, the repercussions can be damaging. Governmental restrictions on benefit eligibility, tighter rules for extra assistance, the introduction of loans to replace grants, applying charges for governmental services that were previously free, and increases of state house rents to market levels all place considerable pressure on those already struggling on low incomes (Downtown Community Ministry, 1999; Square, 1999).

Power plays a central role in realising wellness, resisting oppression, and cultivating the conditions for liberation at personal, relational, and collective levels (Prilleltensky, 2008). Realising wellness in terms of attaining food security means recognising that in order to foster liberation for families entrenched in poverty we need to



find mechanisms that reduce poverty and address the needs of our growing underclass (Prilleltensky, 2008). The underclass emerges from economic and social deprivation and encompasses substance mis-users, mental health clients, and long-term recipients of welfare (the permanent poor) (Auletta, 1999). Addressing the circumstances that create food insecurity need to be recognised at service and societal levels synonymous with our obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil international human rights (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 1996). The United Nations General Comment 14 on the right to the highest attainable standard of health as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) both include food as essential components for procuring adequate levels of health. Policy decisions that positively impact urban poverty can lead to a noticeable amelioration in food insecurity. The 1991 New Zealand benefit cuts, which led many people to find themselves in debt, created a direct and exponential increase in the number of non-profit organisations assuming sole responsibility for the distribution of food to people in need through foodbank initiatives (Wynd, 2011).

Macro-level restructuring of welfare entitlements led to the rapid increase of foodbanks providing directly for micro-level needs. Foodbanks provide a crucial and life-saving service to families in need and are politically sanctioned. However, the system is not challenged and the broader structures remain in place where instead poverty is increasingly framed as a charity issue rather than one of human rights. This leads to the further entrenchment of systemic practices that perpetuate structures disabling people's ability to exercise greater depths of agency (Giddens, 1984). As a result, people who must repeatedly access foodbanks to alleviate hunger for themselves and their families become embedded in the "enduring cycles of

reproduced relations" (Giddens, 1984, p. 131) that both continue to proliferate social systems as well as effectively trapping people.

The neoliberal welfare reforms implemented in 1999 further embedded and strengthened the reforms of the early 1990s. These reforms worked towards having people move from welfare to work. Here, the narrative of welfare shifted away from the promotion of community health. Traditionally, welfare allowed unemployed and disadvantaged people to attain an acceptable living standard, and to feel a sense of communal belonging. The reforms, in contrast, went on to portray beneficiaries as inhibiting economic growth and strongly urged them to become self-reliant, responsible, and to look after themselves (St John & Wynd, 2008). New Zealand, Australia, and Britain are categorised as 'liberal welfare states' as they provide means-tested and partial forms of social assistance (Cheer et al., 2001). Yet these countries straddle an ambiguous division between pioneering welfare state development and the limited provision of social assistance programmes.

In New Zealand, both the *Working for Families* and *Working New Zealand* reforms focus on providing work incentives and childcare subsidies for low-income workers, but fail to provide concrete measures for raising families out of poverty. While simply replacing welfare with paid work helps address superficial normative ideologies of how the urban poor ought to construct and conduct their everyday lives, such changes do not address the underlying problem of income distribution – the real driver of urban poverty (St John & Wynd, 2008). For example, in the early 2000s, many New Zealand beneficiaries moved into paid employment as a result of the strong labour market. Poverty, however, continued to increase by 36% over the four year period (Ministry of Social Development, 2006,

2008). On the ground, the trend of mostly stationary or falling real incomes over the last 20 years for low-wage workers and beneficiaries continues to prove insufficient to meet the most basic of needs in New Zealand. This has been further amplified with rising unemployment and reduced working hours due to the recent global economic crisis (Wynd, 2011), alongside rising living costs, debts, house prices and rents (Wynd, 2005).

With this in mind, it must be recognised and reinforced that those who find themselves in the lived experience of food insecurity, do so predominately because their income is not sufficient to meet basic requirements; an over-determined effect of conditions imposed upon them from actors and interests that reside beyond them. Indeed, food insecurity is contingent upon and influenced by broader contexts, such as the economic and social environments, the built urban environment, and the quality and accessibility to civil services such as *Work and Income New Zealand*. Given that socio-economic status is influenced and shaped by wider political, social, and economic forces, the state of food insecurity and associated health inequalities are intrinsically unfair and unjust.

The sections above have laid the foundation for this paper in which we advocate the importance of understanding the context in which people experiencing food insecurity are situated. This raises an inter-related range of social determinants of health, including physical hardship, social and economic exclusions, educational difficulties, under-employment, stigma, stress, and food insecurity. Often research looks at these issues in isolation. We illustrate how a richer picture emerges when looking at issues in concert, particularly when grappling with the complexities of food insecurity within impoverished communities.

### Method

This discussion paper is aligned alongside others within the scholar-activist tradition in its departure from traditional epistemological approaches in psychology that emphasise scientific, individualised, and apolitical approaches, to a psychology that extends its focus to challenging structural constraints seemingly beyond, yet explicitly implicated in communities (Murray, 2012). We employ a qualitative meta-analysis (Paterson & Canam, 2001) in our approach to making sense of food insecurity and urban poverty. This moves us beyond the individual level of analysis and aims to examine critical community problems in context; exploring the social, cultural, and political dimensions of human issues. In broadening and deepening our understandings of families' experiences of hardship, we include a richer comprehension of how lives tie into-and are tied up by-the broader social tapestry that binds them (Groot, 2010).

Given the relative paucity of research pertaining to issues of food insecurity in New Zealand, we reviewed a comprehensive literature base (academic literature, media items, and not-for-profit organisations and government reports) to draw together various threads of information. With notable exceptions, such as the *Australian Community Psychologist's* special section on critical community psychology approaches to poverty reduction (Fryer & McCormack, 2013), studies conducted are almost entirely quantitative. As a result, these studies may prove less liable to transmit a real sense of the phenomenology of being situated and entrenched in urban poverty. Furthermore, mechanistic and reductionistic methodologies can unintentionally lead academics to develop research that can serve to blame victims for their circumstances (Jeppesen, 2009). This may act to both reinforce neoliberal governmental agendas and further undermine experiences of poverty and oppression.

The literature review was accompanied by two key informant interviews with scholar-activists (Murray, 2012) Marina and Tom (pseudonyms). Both have extensive knowledge and experience working with impoverished communities spanning decades. This qualitative meta-analysis allows us to bring together the varying threads of discourses on poverty in New Zealand – academic literature, media items, and not-for-profit organisations and government reports accompanied by the accounts of scholar-activists. We took an exploratory approach, drawing on secondary data and our own experiences working with marginalised people, in order to engage the broader discipline in a discussion of the social, cultural and political dimensions of food insecurity. Both Marina and Tom and the second author are currently engaged in a larger research project initiated and funded by a leading service provider in Auckland, New Zealand, conducted in collaboration with three universities. The larger project explores the complex lifeworlds of 100 families living in poverty (Hodgetts et al., 2013). It is from this perspective that the first author for this paper, an emerging researcher, wished to engage with experienced scholar-activists to gain a greater appreciation of how critical community psychologists can contribute to broader agendas for social change and justice. This is part of the traditional role in the social sciences of the public intellectual whereby we can provide scholarly support for local communities in developing a coherent and resourced response to the interwoven issues of social inequities, poverty and health.

In the next section, we discuss the constrained lifeworlds of impoverished families. This is set against a backdrop of intensified monitoring and regulation. Specifically, we address urban poverty as a key determinant of food insecurity. The following section relates to how being poor is hard and often unrecognised work, and the

agentic strategies employed by impoverished families to obtain food. Following that, in the closing section, we use lessons gained from this to inform a wider discussion about advocacy in community research aimed at addressing poverty.

### **The ‘Undeserving’ Versus the ‘Deserving’ Poor**

From Darwinian-derived assumptions that the unemployed suffered from hereditary weaknesses and immoral lifestyles in nineteenth century Britain, to the long-standing position in the United States that the impoverished are responsible for their own conditions through laziness and ignorance, OECD societies have a lengthy and recurring tradition of discriminating against those in need (Birn, 2009; Kim, 1998; McFadyen, 1998). Recent qualitative research with people experiencing poverty in urban centres throughout Canada found that participants believed other members of society typically perceive them as lazy, irresponsible, and in pursuit of an easy life (Reutter, Stewart, Veenstra, Love, Raphael, & Makwarimba, 2009). Similar processes of internalising stigma are all too common amongst New Zealand beneficiaries (Welfare Justice, 2010).

Appelbaum (2001) argues that a central discourse concerning people’s attitudes towards, and policy making decisions surrounding, welfare assistance is governed by the degree to which recipients of such support are considered either ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’. The ‘deserving poor’ tends to constitute a category composed almost solely of ‘well-behaved’ people, innocent children, and ‘helpless’ individuals with intellectual or physical impairments (Jeppesen, 2009). By contrast, the ‘undeserving poor’ comprise racialised groups such as immigrants,

refugees, and Indigenous peoples, as well as sex workers and so-called 'welfare mums' (Jeppesen, 2009). Hodgetts and colleagues (2012) argue that these positions often mirror the class from which the people making such assumptions derive. They contend that without taking into consideration the heterogeneity of needs expressed by the diversity of people enmeshed in marginalised lifeworlds, responses are often geared in line with middle class norms and values, and fail to consider people with categorically different needs.

This discourse of who is at fault is further exemplified by dichotomies extending to impoverished parents' ability to care for their own children. This can be seen in rhetoric designed to create a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' parents. The current government, for example, has recently introduced new policy requiring all beneficiary parents to ensure that their children attend at least 15 hours a week in Early Childhood Education from the age of 3, or face their benefit being cut by half (Beehive, 2012). Implicit in this policy is an assumption that beneficiaries are not capable of caring for their children in a capacity equivalent to that of employed people, who have the right to choose how their children will be educated.

To be considered good and deserving, such families should be faultless and mothers should not be single by choice (Jeppesen, 2009). When engaging Marina on public discourse that positions mothers receiving food parcels as incompetent parents who have made bad choices, Marina spoke of her own interactions with families in a frontline capacity. She noted the intensified monitoring of young beneficiary mothers:

I think it is a very comfortable armchair assumption. For a lot of the young women, staying home with a baby is very difficult. I mean, staying at home with a

baby is very difficult for anyone, but they [solo-beneficiary mothers] are watched much more carefully than say the young 18 year old woman from Remuera [an affluent and predominantly European suburb in Auckland] would be watched by CYFS [Child, Youth and Family Services]. They tend to be put immediately on their watch list, which puts you in a position of defence really which only makes things more difficult. You often find that children get fed before adults in a family, and fathers and mothers certainly go without food before their children.

Marina evokes the intensified nature of policing and regulation experienced by mother's who must depend on the state for assistance. Boyer (2006; cited in Hodgetts et al., 2013) unifies the body and issues of scale in the manoeuvres of welfare reform, from the macro scale of society to the micro scale of the body; the focus remains on individual behaviour while the social structures that cause increased inequities are obscured.

As is the case in many other countries, New Zealand's Indigenous people (Māori) and racialised immigrant groups (Pasifika Peoples) are over represented in lower socio-economic groups and are consequently most affected by food insecurity (Bidwell, 2009). Such groups are the targets of structural racism and are quickly categorised as the 'undeserving poor' (Jeppesen, 2009). In her interview, Marina spoke of the cultural and socio-economic complexities that are often ignored and dismissed when forming responses to such groups:

Sometimes the 'choices' aren't theirs, you know? People can have no money because there has been a death in the family. Pacific Island families contribute to funeral costs [back home in the

Islands as well as in a new land]. Māori have tangi [Māori death rituals], and they have to travel and contribute koha [cultural requirement to provide a gift to the host marae]. There are often unexpected costs such as car registration. And if you've got to do that one week then you won't have money for food. Then there is the big winter power bill, or a school trip often puts families into hardship, or buying school shoes or winter uniforms. So, there are all sorts of legitimate reasons for the lack of food. I don't think that families ever intentionally don't want to feed their children. I mean, how anybody can even feed a family on the DPB [Domestic Purposes Benefit] is beyond me; there is just not enough money.

In New Zealand (Wynd, 2005) and elsewhere (Dowler, 2002), many responses towards poverty fall in line with a neoliberal ideology that predominately focus on individual responsibility and change (cooking, skills, nutritional education). When attempting to conceptualise food insecurity, one needs to acknowledge and assess the complex interplay of various social factors. As Marina illustrates in the above quote, these include cultural practices, socio-economic status, and – for marginalised Indigenous and migrant groups – the historical impacts of colonisation and migration to a hostile new country and re-settlement (Groot et al., 2012; Kearns et al., 1991).

In an experimental study, Appelbaum (2001) found that liberal policies were more likely to be recommended when the target group was considered deserving and, therefore, not responsible for their own poverty. This echoes Tom's consideration of the dominant narratives of food insecurity in

New Zealand, and to whom they benefit:

Clearly, individualising has a large function... we have this rhetoric around the notion that people can be successful and they can live reasonably well in this land of plenty, God's own etcetera, and if they fail to do that then somehow they, and not society, has failed... and while this individualising process makes them responsible for failure, it also allows people to claim personal responsibility for success... So John Key [current Prime Minister of New Zealand] grew up in a state house and the story around that is that "Anybody who grew up in a state house can make it like I have."

Both Marina and Tom throughout their accounts strongly contested references to personal deficits and failings and instead illustrated agency and constraint in the lives of families. However, such narratives that are centred on ideologies of individual responsibility; reflect a contemporary era where selfhood is often defined and expressed through the promotion and celebration of narcissism, selfishness, independence, and individualism (Howell & Ingham, 2001). Certainly, such overtly simplistic binaries between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor affords the few 'individuals' who are able to move out of poverty the ability to be framed as successful, whilst simultaneously pointing a finger at people who cannot transcend their circumstances as the cause of their own predicament.

### **Agency and Struggle in the Lives of Impoverished Families**

The concept of agency acknowledges intention as a primary factor in creating action; it similarly recognises that the world is not entirely malleable to the will of the

agent. Giddens and Pierson (1998) define agency as “the capability to have done otherwise” (p. 78). The ability to exercise agency is considerably more restrained for impoverished families in the face of domineering labour market and economic forces (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). However, to assume that families experiencing food insecurity are, as Prime Minister John Key recently asserted, making poor choices (Trevett, 2011), fails to acknowledge the agency demonstrated by the urban poor. Marina reflected on what such agentic strategies looked like for families whose lifeworlds were considerably constrained:

Some people come in on the bus and then carry what is a big food parcel in a large box and we help them to break it down and catch a bus back home; it’s quite a commitment. Carrying the baby and all the food goes in the pram and they walk home. I have one mum who walks to see me from Otara [to Otahuhu in South Auckland, 50 minute walk] every fortnight. So I always organise her appointment around my lunch time so I can drive her home with her parcel. Their commitment is quite strong; you’ve got to feed your family. A food parcel is meant to last a week... myself and my colleagues are not quite sure how you would make it last a week, but people are very clever at stretching them. Some women and men share wonderful stories of how they have used their food parcels and the good meals they have made.

Marina emphasised the varied strategies available to families, such as walking uncomfortable distances saddled with heavy food packages and children in tow. In the face of structural limitations, such as insufficient incomes and restricted food

parcels, we find resilient, creative, loving, and knowledgeable actors drawing upon their own supportive networks and resources to create situations of dignity (Jeppesen, 2009). Impoverished families often do seek to transform their conditions within severely limited means.

Research with beneficiaries in New Zealand has found that people often have very demeaning and unsatisfying experiences with government agencies when attempting to engage and receive support from them (Hodgetts et al., 2013; Presbyterian Services Otago, 2008). Research commissioned by the Presbyterian Services Otago (2008) reports the great lengths participants go to receive their full entitlements from welfare agencies, and often do not know about extra assistance available because of their limited access to such information. Tom similarly spoke of the sheer amount of obstacles impoverished families contend with when attempting to seek assistance from agencies:

The number of agencies they have to deal with, and the number of agencies they are required to deal with, is immense. Alongside this, you have agencies they are caught up with through debts and all sorts of things, and then underneath that is how much work they have to do to be in touch with these agencies. And then you might be thinking, “Well they are supposed to be available to get a job or train or whatever,” but then they have many other responsibilities such as going to hospital with a child. It’s just a constant battle. There is a lot of time and energy caught up in being poor.

Prevailing narratives portray ill-health, unemployment and poverty as primarily

matters of individual failure and of personal responsibility (Mooney, 2009). In contrast, Tom draws our attention to hardship in other areas such as the importance of social capital and the way in which its lack can place significant psychological, emotional, and organisational strain on parents. Boon and Farnsworth (2011) assert that social capital or being connected to a network of people is not enough – it is the extent to which support systems are able to be utilised to create resource accessibility that is of greater significance. The authors contend that difficulties can arise when attempting to find employment that does not negatively impact on family responsibilities. Without close social networks parents cannot access crucial supports such as childcare.

A social fabric comprising strong and trusted networks of family, friends, and systemic supports is an important indicator as to the extent greater opportunities may be afforded for impoverished families in day-to-day life (Boon & Farnsworth, 2011). In the interview, Marina spoke of the agentic methods some families use such as “whole streets [neighbours] coming in one car” to collect food parcels. These ecologically-structured advantages are not, however, available to everyone, and should be taken into consideration by social scientists, policy makers, and service providers if we are to provide effective support or else we risk reframing social exclusion as ‘self-exclusion’ (Mooney, 2009).

Poverty is profoundly time consuming; it requires constant hard work and can be deeply distressing. While such realities are often obscured or simply unrecognised in popular discourse, their burden is continually carried by people facing hardship (Boon & Farnsworth, 2011). From dealing with the stress and anxiety of seldom having enough money to meet basic needs such as rent, power, food and hospital visits, to the intensely problematic nature of negotiating the challenges of seeking secure employment,

being poor is hard work (Presbyterian Services Otago, 2008). Time spent simply attempting to navigate the sheer number of obstacles encountered could be considered equivalent to a full time job in and of itself (Hodgetts et al., 2013). Marina provided an analogous account of the experience of time (or lack thereof) in a family’s attempt to deal with food insecurity:

They are pretty busy. For instance, appointments to try and get a food grant are probably up to a three hour wait each time. And if you have to walk there and walk back that’s six hours of your day gone. Then you have children to look after and general housework to take care of but if you’ve got a family of even five to look after, it’s beyond me. They are busy. Just maintaining clean clothes, washing the dishes, cleaning the house; they are busy people.

In the above excerpt, Marina references the significant amount of time one must exhaust in simply reaching service providers. People in poverty often walk due to a lack of car ownership (and to save on public transport costs), or simply because costs of running a car are often too great to justify maintenance (Presbyterian Services Otago, 2008). Furthermore, additional time is often expended through purchasing smaller amounts of food more frequently in order to help save larger food purchases being consumed too quickly, and to assist in freeing up any extra money available (Walker, 2005). Similarly, considerable time is also spent locating the cheapest items as there is no room to make errors or waste money (Nolan et al., 2006).

As outlined above, socio-economic status determines the degree to which food insecurity becomes a lived reality. Walker (2005) contests that while people of low socio-economic status recognise a higher

paid occupation or full-time employment as the best means to raise themselves out of poverty, practical barriers such as a lack of qualifications and/or access to childcare often prevent a way out. Tom elucidated how people become trapped in enduring cycles of poverty:

Food insecurity is mostly about poverty, and having debt and insufficient income to actually deal with food. A lot of the families in our research have a very limited amount of money and what they use it for first is to keep a roof over their head, then they pay all the essential bills such as electricity and rent or they find ways of deferring them for a while if they haven't got enough money, but food often comes last.

In the excerpt above, Tom discusses the reality for many families whereby food becomes a discretionary item weighted against other equally pressing concerns crucial to survival (Presbyterian Services Otago, 2008). Tom goes on to make links between food and nutrition as critical to health (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012):

Food insecurity, or better yet food insufficiency, has this idea of you don't know where the next meal is coming from but most of the families we are talking to know what food they have access to and some of it is just terrible. Not having enough food is often about not having access to enough of the right sort of food, so people will substitute food. People are living badly on the cheapest food they can get, like lots of cheap pot noodles and things like that and then there's a household at the centre of this, not a person... so food insecurity probably needs to be defined more collectively than just 'a person who is food

insecure' because around that person is usually a collection of other people.

Food policy in neoliberal states, such as New Zealand, is dominated by an individual choice model (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). Trade and financial rights govern entitlement and the state's role is largely concerned with the regulation of the food supply and retail divisions. There is a disconcerting omission of food as an essential element of public health, even less so as central to citizens' rights and with little recognition of the food component to welfare (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). Within this framework, the hegemonic discursive position is to question micro-level competencies within low income households through a focus on sufficiency of nutritional knowledge, one's ability to budget, shop, and cook or to make the 'appropriate choices' in shops stocking food (Presbyterian Services Otago, 2008). The pervasive underlying assumption here is that people have sufficient money to buy appropriate food (and therefore can make the 'appropriate choices'), yet the cost of food in relation to income is not regulated (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012).

### **Conclusion: Engaging Psychology**

Food insecurity and urban poverty are inextricably intertwined and are exasperated by structural constraints. They occur and are maintained by a wide and complex range of factors such as multiple debts (Walker, 2005), low income (McPherson, 2006), a limited capacity to save money (Nolan et al., 2006), lack of adequately paid job opportunities (Wynd, 2005), lack of strong and trusted social networks (Boon & Farnsworth, 2011), and childcare obligations (Gingrich, 2008).

Food insecurity is a human rights issue. International human rights obligations should inform the governmental duty to ensure its people's food requirements are met (Dowler



& O'Connor, 2012). Here, adequate nutrition is tied to the right to health; the way in which international treaties and committees recognise this are important guidelines for policymakers to consider when addressing urban poverty. We argue against relocating explanations of critical public health concerns, such as illness and unemployment, from the public to the personal domain (Birn, 2009). Unproductive and disempowering explanations of such experiences due to personal failure or poor decision-making ignore the numerous elements at play over and above the individual (Howell & Ingham, 2001). Indeed, taking power and social context into account is paramount when seeking to explore human competence and well-being, and attempting to articulate adequate responses and interventions.

Within the limitations of a small explanatory study, we have attempted to respond to calls for a focus on the structural components of food insecurity as part of a broader discussion. Further research needs to take place with marginalised groups themselves to truly encapsulate a scholar-activist approach. We aimed to draw on a diverse knowledge base including academic literature and media and government reports as well as the accounts of experienced scholar-activists as a basis for conceptualising issues and developing responses. This is in support of a community psychology practice that engages and works with marginalised people in New Zealand. The points made through our meta-analysis express the importance of 'stepping back' and understanding people in relation to the larger systems in which they are situated. Impoverished lifeworlds are multifaceted, diverse, fail to fall into conveniently categorised dualities, and defy simple explanations such as individual incompetence.

Contrary to popular discourse, which paint the urban poor as lazy, stupid, and immoral (Birn, 2009; Howell & Ingham, 2001; McFadyen, 1998), being poor is

hard work. Parents often do extensive amounts of walking to and from food banks and a multitude of other agencies in order to provide for their families. Time is often spent looking for the cheapest items in supermarkets and smaller amounts are purchased due to a lack of finances, or to prevent eating too much at once. Alongside this, dealing with agencies such as *Work and Income New Zealand* can often be a demeaning and frustrating experience. Furthermore, the extent to which people are able to help themselves often depends on the strength of their social networks – having extensive and trusted social capital can help improve access to employment opportunities and ameliorate psycho-emotional stress (Boon & Farnsworth, 2011).

By including the broader facets of human experience we engender a psychology that is better equipped to capture the complexity of everyday life, in all its messiness and troublesome states of flux. As current and future psychologists, we need to situate our work within local socio-political contexts (Groot et al., 2012). It is from this vantage point that we may gain a richer and more humane view of the people we work with and for.

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**‘You get forced to live with randoms ... and that makes you stronger as a person’: Homeless Western Australian teenagers’ perspectives on their experiences of residing in crisis accommodation**

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*Homelessness is a growing, but poorly understood, social phenomenon. It is hypothesised that the fulfilment of homeless teenagers’ psychosocial needs supports normative development and facilitates mental well-being. This exemplar phenomenological study investigated the crisis accommodation living experiences of eight homeless teenagers aged 16 to 19 years and interpreted these experiences in relation to Maslow’s hierarchy of human need. The findings reveal that homeless teenagers achieve a measure of resilience by overcoming their safety fears and subsequently establishing a sense of belonging within the homeless community. Finally, the teenagers’ ability, under difficult circumstances, to establish an identity, individuality, and integrity seemingly provided them with sufficient internal fortitude that they were then able to set and achieve their personal goals.*

Even though youth homelessness is a global phenomenon, accurate counts of homelessness are exceedingly difficult to collect. Notwithstanding this difficulty, it is conservatively estimated that in Australia somewhere between 22,000 and 40,000 12 to 18 year old youths are homeless on any given night (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011). Furthermore, it is anticipated that half of all Australia’s homeless youths will access crisis accommodation on one or more occasion over the course of their period of homelessness (ABS, 2011; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008). One purported reason for the high rate of youth homeless is that adolescence is the developmental period in which young people first become capable of looking after themselves outside of the confines of the family home. Of growing concern to the Australian Government is the realisation that, in 2008, 14% of all within-school adolescents in the state of Victoria were found to be at-risk for homelessness (Bearsley-Smith, Bond, Littlefield, & Thomas, 2008).

Historically, a formal definition of homelessness has also been difficult to

formulate due to the heterogeneity of the homeless population and the temporal nature of the homelessness experience (Rossi, 1989). However, this situation changed somewhat in 1992 when Chamberlain and MacKenzie conceptualised a two-tiered (primary and secondary) definition of homelessness, which is now widely accepted. They conceptualised primary homelessness to be a habitation state in which individuals lack any form of permanent accommodation and, thus, routinely shelter/sleep in dilapidated buildings or public spaces. In contrast, they conceptualised secondary homelessness to be a habitation state in which individuals sleep/reside in transient or temporary accommodation, including, formal crisis accommodation and informal ‘couch-surfing’ in the homes of extended family members/friends. However, Chamberlain and MacKenzie’s classification does not fully capture the complexity of displacement that can occur within different cultural groupings. For example, Memmott and colleagues (2005), in their examination of homelessness within Australia’s Indigenous population, identified three distinct categories of

homelessness, namely, the public place dwellers (i.e., the primary homeless), the hidden homeless (i.e., the secondary homeless), and the spiritually homeless (i.e., those disconnected from their lands). A greater understanding of spiritual homelessness among indigenous populations would appear warranted given that recent research has suggested that “Indigenous cultural practices can shape a person’s efforts to retain a positive sense of self and place while homeless” (Groot, Hodgetts, Nikora, & Leggat-Cook, 2011, p. 375).

Regardless of classification type, homelessness is rarely a once-off event and the duration of homelessness can vary from brief episodic periods to protracted periods (MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2003). Contrary to popular belief, only a small minority of teenagers actually choose homelessness as a response to a youthful conflict with parents over a single non-compliance related issue, for instance, non-fulfilment of family rules, school commitments, household chores, unacceptable personal habits, or parental disapproval of their social relationships (Krusi, Fast, Small, Wood, & Kerr, 2010; Moriarty, 2009). Instead, most youthful occurrences of homelessness occur as a result of a combinational (cluster) effect of multiple adverse or traumatic experiences, for example, parental substance (drugs/alcohol) abuse, parental mental ill-health, parental/peer favourable attitudes towards antisocial behaviour, parental criminality, within home exposure to domestic violence (e.g., physical, sexual, emotional and verbal), parental relationship breakdowns, family restructuring due to death/divorce/remarriage, intergenerational family/cultural conflict and/or the excitement allure of a rebellious, non-conforming street lifestyle (Bearsley-Smith et al., 2008; Broadhead-Fearn & White, 2006; Cauce, Paradise, Ginzler, & Embry, 2000; Kidd, 2007; Rosenthal, Mallett, & Myers, 2006). Other compounding stressors for youth homelessness include parental under/

unemployment, poor parenting skills, accumulated debt, high housing rents, and unavailability of community housing (Thompson, Bender, Windsor, Cook, & Williams, 2010). Multiple stressors both contribute to the risk of homelessness and considerably reduce the social capital resources homeless parents are able to provide their teenage children (MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2003; Stein, Zane, & Rotheram-Borus, 2009). This lack of support resources becomes critical when families reach the crisis point of having to access emergency family accommodation. For, at this time, their teenage children are at-risk of being separated from the family as some crisis accommodation units have upper age child residential limits (Australian National Youth Commission, 2008).

Once separated from their family, homeless teenagers are at an additional risk of minimal educational achievement, conflict with teachers, conduct problems, poor school attendance, school disengagement, peer-group rejection and social stigmatisation (Farrugia, 2010; Kidd, 2007); these issues stem from situational factors affecting the homeless teenager’s ability to sustain school attendance (Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, & Peters, 2003). For example, homeless teenagers generally lack the necessary financial resources to buy school clothes/supplies and to procure transport to and from their school. Additionally, they are likely to lack a supportive adult to provide school motivational encouragement (Cauce et al., 2000; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2002; Thompson et al., 2010).

Indeed, not only is the pursuance of an education difficult for homeless teenagers, so too is their ability when living on the streets to maintain fundamental levels of physical and dental hygiene. In this regard, homeless teenagers typically experience the compounding difficulties of being exposed to the elements, having a poor nutritional intake, poor sanitary options and, when sick,

having problems securing sufficient funds to access appointment based health services (Australian National Youth Commission, 2008; Hwang, 2001; Thompson et al., 2010). These health access limitations place homeless teenagers at a heightened risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy in females (Bessant, 2001). Typically, homeless youth have limited access to health information about STDs and financially are unable to pay for protective contraceptive devices (Rosenthal et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2010).

A further common consequence of teenage homelessness is an increased risk for mental illness (Kamieniecki, 2001; Merscham, Van Leeuwen, & McGuire, 2009). Indeed, it is currently estimated that 26% of all homeless youth have a psychotic or mood disorder with most presenting with one or more comorbidities (e.g., depression, anxiety, addiction, self-injurious behaviours, suicide-ideation and suicide attempt; Kamieniecki, 2001; Kidd & Carroll, 2007; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006; Merscham et al., 2009). This increase in mental illness is exacerbated by the homeless teenager's daily need to secure food and shelter (Thompson et al., 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that the rate of criminal offending (e.g., petty stealing, disorderly conduct, fare avoidance) among homeless youth is significantly higher than it is among their non-homeless peers (Chamberlain, Johnson, & Theobald, 2006; Merscham et al., 2009; Slesnick, Prestonpik, Meyers, & Glassman, 2007; Thompson et al., 2010). Moreover, of growing concern for society is the realisation that some homeless teenagers are being groomed by older criminals to engage in drug related crimes (Thompson et al., 2010; Viorsta et al., 2009). Indeed, homeless youths' involvement in drug related crimes might provide one explanation as to why 66% of all homeless youth are estimated to be drug takers (Chamberlain et al., 2006).

Finally, it is recognised that the longer

young people are in a state of homelessness, the harder it becomes for them to exit their homeless state (Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008). Thus, a pressing imperative for all governments is to put in place early intervention programs, especially as they have been shown to be a cheaper and more efficient means of deterring homelessness (Freeman, 1999; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008). This push for early intervention is particularly pertinent in Australia given that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009) estimated that, of the 125,600 people accessing crisis accommodation services, 38% are unaccompanied youth. The Australian Government's key policy initiative in trying to address the complex issue of youth homelessness is the establishment of the 2009 service delivery National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010) with a central aim of providing 'safe' crisis accommodation to the homeless. Additional aims include the enhancement of independent living skills, access to medical and mental health services, engagement in drug/alcohol rehabilitation programs, and exposure to future employment opportunities (Broadhead-Fearn & White, 2006; Carlson, Sugano, Millstein, & Auerswald, 2006; Dalton & Pakenham, 2002; Kidd, 2007; Thompson et al., 2010). Although NAHA's aims are clearly articulated, some knowledge implementation gaps exist. One such gap is an understanding of homeless teenagers' experiences of living in temporary crisis accommodation. It is this gap that this study aims to help fill.

### Method

Unlike most qualitative studies that aim to generate theory or findings that are transferable to a larger population, the sole objective of exemplar studies such as this is to develop an understanding of a hitherto poorly understood phenomenon within a

defined context. A key attribute of exemplar studies is that they allow data from within and across one or more datasets to be intensely interrogated and rigorously contrasted (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). Through this process, one case study becomes an exemplar for other studies. Flyvbjerg (2006) maintains that exemplar studies are critically important as “a scientific discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without a systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one” (p. 219). Indeed, the combined strength of exemplar studies is that they generate findings that by weight of their combined numbers produce insights into the investigated phenomenon, which are reflective of the lived experience of the wider population (Punch, 2005; Stake, 1995). The value of exemplar studies is judged by whether they bring something new or different to the understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001).

This exemplar study sought to explore the issues affecting the lives of homeless teenagers in Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. An interpretive phenomenological approach was adopted due to the exploratory nature of the research (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Patton, 2002). The epistemology of interpretive phenomenology is concerned with examining revelations that are embedded deeply in the investigated participants’ lived experiences (Flood, 2010; Groenewald, 2004). Moreover, through detailing participants’ accounts of how they make sense of both their personal and social worlds, any common themes contained within their narratives not only emerge, but also provide the reader with an insider-like perspective on the phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Interpretative phenomenological inquiry requires the “elimination of the

(researchers) natural attitudes and biases of everyday knowledge as the basis for truth and reality” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). Thus, the present authors strove (as far as possible) to suspend their own expectations and values about youth homelessness in order to open up their receptivity to the participants’ narratives. To achieve this high level of knowledge of self, the researchers followed the long-standing reflective phenomenological practice of keeping journalised notes on their thoughts so that any assumptive thoughts could be self-questioned (Beck, 1994; Drew, 1989).

### ***Participants***

The study’s five female and three male homeless teenagers were at the time of their interview residing in crisis accommodation. The cultural diversity in the sample (i.e., two teenagers of African ethnicity, one Aboriginal, one Asian and the remaining four Caucasian) reflects the growing multicultural population of Perth. The teenagers ranged in age from 16 to 18 years. The duration of their homelessness varied in length from 2 weeks to 18 months. Five of the teenagers had experienced multiple crisis accommodation placements while three were experiencing their first crisis placement at the time of the study. As recruitment occurred over a two-month period, not all of the participants resided in the same crisis accommodation unit, nor were all of the teenagers accommodated simultaneously.

### ***Materials***

Semi-structured interviews have been determined to be a respectful way of gathering information from vulnerable populations because this form of interviewing facilitates the development of a non-threatening rapport between interviewer and interviewee and provides sufficient flexibility in the content direction that rich data can be gathered for analysis (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Patton, 2002). The questions were open-ended and when necessary were followed by additional



probing questions. Examples questions included: Please share with me what it is like for you living in crisis accommodation? Thinking about your experience(s) of living in crisis accommodation what things do you consider are good? What things haven't been so great? What things do you think you need to grow up well while living here in crisis accommodation? What are the main challenges you have faced in growing up in crisis accommodation?

### **Procedure**

Ethics approval was granted from the administering institution to conduct the interviews with the homeless teenagers through the auspices of the organisation *Youth Futures WA*, which provides homeless young people aged between 16 to 25 years with assistance to gain housing support and accommodation services. The central inclusion criteria for participation in the project were that participants were teenagers who had experienced homelessness and were residing in crisis accommodation at the time of the interview. The eight respondents who met these criteria were contacted at their accommodation unit and a mutually-agreeable time and safe location for the interview was arranged. Each teenager was given an information letter detailing the study's objectives and a consent form to sign.

Prior to the start of the interview, the first author explained the intentions of the study and then informed the teenager of their participatory rights. This process provided each teenager with an opportunity to ask questions and to also withdraw from the study if they chose to do so. The interview was delivered informally in an open-ended and non-directive style so as to provide the teenaged participants with the maximum opportunity to discuss their homelessness experiences (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). All of the interviews were audio recorded with the teenagers' permission and their interview sessions each lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions formed the dataset which was subsequently analysed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) process (Groenewald, 2004; Willig, 2008). Maintaining research rigour was an integral and integrated component of this process. In this regard, theoretical rigour was enhanced by both keeping a reflective journal and a consistent audit trail (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). In addition, after the first author transcribed the interviews, the second author independently checked 50% of the transcriptions to verify their accuracy. Following this transcription check, the three authors separately familiarised themselves with the content of the transcripts by repeatedly reading them.

IPA operates from the premise that a chain of connections exists between people's thoughts, speech and emotional states and it is the task of the phenomenological researcher to 'make sense' of these connections (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Although not essential for the IPA 'sense-making' process, the dual concepts of bracketing (inspecting) and epoché (synthesising) were employed in this study (Bednall, 2006; Crist & Tanner, 2003; Johnson, 2000). Bracketing first occurred during the inspecting processes of 'iterative reading' and 'flagging items' (Bednall, 2006). During which time the first dataset was inspected and unfocused memo notes (i.e., reflections, associations, comments and questions) were written in the margins of the text so that data of potential interest could be identified, recorded and audited (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was repeated with all interview datasets. Next, the second bracketing stage of 'establishing topics of significance' was employed (Bednall, 2006). During this stage, the memo notes were continually refined, discussed and ordered until an accurate representation of the participants' recounted

meaning contained within the narratives emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the memo writing process was complete the authors embarked on the third bracketing stage of 'delineating units of meaning' (i.e., codes) to the ordered memo notes (Bednall, 2006; Willig, 2008).

Unlike the discrete process of bracketing, epoché is an ongoing process of synthesising data. In this regard, the researchers strove during their data synthesising process to set aside any personal bias or unexplained assumptions, to make connections between the clusters of codes (identified during the bracketing process) and, to reintegrate the codes into the study's sub/themes on the basis of their interpreted shared meaning and/or hierarchal relationships (Bednall, 2006; Groenewald, 2004). Finally, the authors used member checking to confirm the authenticity of the sub/themes (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

### **Findings and Interpretations**

The aim of this study was to explore the psychosocial needs of adolescents living in crisis accommodation. During the analytic process of bracketing a number of discrete needs described by the study's homeless youth were identified. Subsequently, during the epoché synthesising stages of the analytic process, these needs were clustered both on the basis of their common meanings and their hierarchal relationships. During the synthesis process it became apparent that the needs that the youth articulated were not only hierarchal, but also linear in their progression. For instance, the teenagers' initial concerns related primarily to their basic need for food, shelter and safety. When these primal needs were perceived to have been met, then the teenagers began speaking of their attempts to try to establish meaningful connections with other members of the street community and agency workers with whom they came into frequent contact. Finally, the adolescents indicated that they

only stopped being preoccupied with their 'here and now' subsistence needs and started to contemplate their future needs when they felt safe and supported.

Given the identified hierarchal nature of the homeless adolescents needs a post-analysis decision was made to explore the teenagers' need assertions in relation to one of psychology long-standing theories on human needs, namely, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human need. Maslow theorised that need is the primary precedence that motivates human behaviour (Berk, 2007). Whereas, Maslow's most basic level of physiological need (i.e., for shelter, food, water, sleep) were adequately met within all of the teenagers' crisis accommodation units. However, this was not the case for Maslow's second (physiological safety), third (belonging), fourth (esteem), and fifth (self-actualisation) levels of need. The subthemes that emerged from the data analysis in relation to each of these four partially met needs are expanded upon below.

#### ***The Homeless Teenage Need for Safety***

Whereas young people living on the streets are known to experience threats to their personal safety, little is known about the teenage experience of threat while residing in crisis accommodation (Rivard, Bloom, McCorkle, & Abramovitz, 2005). The body of threat-related literature suggests that exposure to in/direct violence can elevate the exposed individual's sense of fear of both personal injury and of the unknown. Moreover, if left unaddressed, such fear can lead to presentations of posttraumatic stress symptoms in the exposed individual (Cooley-Quille, Boyd, Frantz, & Walsh, 2002). For instance, fearful individuals tend to initially engage in a freeze, 'stop, look, and listen' hypervigilant response (Davis, Suris, Lambert, Heimberg, & Petty, 1997). This usually is followed by a flight urge which can manifest itself as psychological withdrawal or social isolation. In turn, this is often replaced by a fight response which can

take the form of venting (i.e., verbal rage), physical aggression (i.e., defensive retaliation), or feelings of uncontrolled anger (Bracha, 2004; Davis et al., 1997; Carswell, Maughan, Davenport, & Goddard, 2004). The next fear induced safety adaptation is the fright response which tends to elicit 'panic-like' symptoms (Bracha, 2004).

The study's teenagers spoke of two types of fear they had experienced during their stay in crisis accommodation, namely, a fear for their physical safety and a fear for their psychological well-being. These two experiences of threat are detailed below.

**Fears for physical safety.** In terms of the freeze hypervigilant threat response, some teenagers reported that at times they felt so threatened and intimidated by the other crisis accommodation residents that they were constantly on guard for any potential source of danger. Although, flight to a safer environment was not an option for the study's homeless teenagers, some revealed that their place of relative safety was their bed/room within the accommodation unit. Though, even here the threat of danger never left them. For example, two teenagers recalled:

I found it really scary and I was just afraid at night. I remember crying myself to sleep a few times, coz it was just so scary and I wasn't use to it. (Male Teenager #3)

If you don't feel belonging you'll feel more shy, and you're like locking yourself in your room.

Closing yourself in. (Female Teenager #4)

Seven of the study's teenagers perceived the other residents in their crisis accommodation unit to be the most likely (or actual) source of threat to their physical wellbeing. When asked to explain why, they stated that some of the unit's other residents were mentally unstable. One teenager explained:

Some people here, well some are

stable and some are unstable. Coz some of them are a bit psycho.

(Female Teenager #5)

In some cases, the teenagers' fears of attack had been realised. One teenager recounted her experience of attack by a fellow resident. Another teenager confided that his fear of attack over time morphed into feelings of anger:

It was really hard when I first got here. I was lonely. No one would talk to me. No one really talked to me... It (the isolation and the fear) would make me angry. (Male, Teenager #8)

**Fears for psychological wellbeing.**

The teenagers vented their anger about the threat the other residents posed to their safety. They complained that the presence and power of some of the more menacing residents exerted within the unit meant that unless they were willing to confront (fight) them, then they had no other real option (if they wanted to maintain their own safety) than to agree to become involved in their criminal acts (e.g., drug taking; stealing). They rationalised their actions in the following terms:

I knew it was the wrong thing [shoplifting] but I had to, they told me I had to... When you come to this place (crisis accommodation) you become someone else. Because of the other people who are in here. (Male Teenager, #1)

When I first moved in there was one guy, and he was a weed smoker. And I wasn't at that time, I was against drugs. He kinda got me started into it. And then I really didn't like it and I felt like I really wanna to say no but (then) I really didn't wanna say no. I said ok. (Female Teenager #5)

Some teenagers reflected that the decline they experienced in their personal

values as a result of their involvement in crime left them feeling emotionally numb to their crisis accommodation experience. To the extent that one teenager revealed she had in her despair resorted to self-harm:

I scare myself with my urges to cut, to die, to do anything to feel better. (Female Teenager #4)

The teenagers indicated that their initial experience of fear only began to dissipate when they started to feel accepted within the crisis accommodation unit.

### ***The Homeless Teenage Need to Belong***

Maslow (1954) ranked the sense of belonging as the third highest fundamental human need, placing it above only the basic human physiological and safety needs. Historically, the need to belong has been associated with the processes of obtaining recognition acceptance and involvement with others (Anant, 1969; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). The act of becoming connected to, affiliated with, and accepted by others is considered critical to the maintenance of healthy emotions and cognitive processes (Cicchini, 2009; Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi, & Cummins, 2008; Steger & Kashdan, 2009). Indeed, a sizeable body of literature exists which demonstrates that the sense of community belonging is critical developmentally to the adolescent experience of life (McNeeley, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Pretty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006). However, the protective resource that a sense of community belonging brings is notably lacking among newly homeless teenagers. Moreover, this lack of community belonging is posited to be one of the key antecedents for teenage experimentation with drug usage, intentional injury, and delinquency as well as a prime contributor to their experience of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation (Anderman, 2002; Choenarom, Williams, & Hagerty, 2005; Evans, 2007; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007; Sun & Hui, 2007; Ueno,

2005; Vandemark, 2007).

**Sense of community belonging.** The study's homeless teenagers revealed that during the course of their first crisis accommodation experience it was only after their initial fears had dissipated that they began to interact with the other residents. It was through this interaction that they discovered that a sense of community existed among the unit's residents. One participant equated this sense of community to that of a family:

Like basically in that house (previous crisis accommodation) it was like a family. Well that's what we called it when I was living there. Well basically we are a family anyway. (Female Teenager #2)

The teenagers' commented that their sense of belonging was contingent on the length of their stay and who else was accommodated in the unit. For instance, if the unit was full of first-time homeless teenagers who were in transit to a more stable placement, there was little interaction. However, if the unit was occupied by seasoned 'street kids,' the sense of community was more palpable. The difficulty the teenagers experienced in terms of maintaining a sense of belonging was that crisis accommodation is short-stay accommodation. One teenager described his cyclic crisis accommodation experience as follows:

It's kinda just like a place you can stay only three months and then you're out somewhere else. They are already trying to get rid of me. (Male Teenager #8)

**Bonded through conformity.** Despite their transient existence the teenagers revealed that they had bonded with the street homeless community by conforming to their social norms. In this regard, the teenagers spoke of having to be seen to adopt the attitudes and behaviours of the street if they

were to be accepted by the wider homeless community. One teenager explained:

(At first) I felt like I didn't belong anywhere. (Then I realised) I needed to do everything that everyone else was doing so I could fit in. I didn't know who I was at one time. Other people were doing this and that and I was just totally different. As soon as I started doing what they were doing like getting drunk and like doing weed and stuff I seemed to fit in. (Female Teenager #7)

**Intimacy.** The homeless teenagers also spoke of their need for intimate and physical connections (i.e., warmth, trust and love) with others. In the absence of a conventional support figure (e.g., parent, teacher, or extended family member) some teenagers expressed their desire to establish an open and honest (non-sexual) relationship with a member of the crisis accommodation staff. As one teenager put it:

I just wanted to feel like they actually care about me. (Female Teenager #6)

As this need was rarely met, the teenagers turned to their fellow residents for affection and physical intimacy. Two teenagers rationalised their actions thus:

Not having relationships. It's crap. They (relationships) are normal. (Female Teenager #5)

People are all we got. We need someone to love. It's what makes this life bearable. (Male Teenager #1)

The teenagers recounted that their need for love and affection was rarely recognised by the unit's management. Moreover, there were often strict rules prohibiting intimate relationships between residents. One teenager stated that her unit's rules on sexual intimacy between residents was the very reason she had left her former crisis accommodation unit and had for a time returned to the street. She

concluded:

It teaches you that relationships aren't ok. Coz what are you going to do, move out onto the street so you can have one. That's what I did. (Female Teenager #3)

### ***Homeless Teenage Need for Autonomy and Self-esteem***

Maslow's (1954) fourth level of human need is that of esteem. Allen and colleagues (1994) linked the achievement of self-esteem during adolescence with ego-development and the acquisition of a sense of personal autonomy. In turn, the acquisition of autonomy (self-governance) is the fundamental precept of successful individualisation, self-initiated expression, independent cognitive, emotional and behavioural functioning and, self-reliance (Soenens et al., 2007). When autonomy is gained prematurely, homeless teenagers tend to experience greater difficulty than their non-homeless peers in establishing a self-identity and sense of self-belief (Soenens et al., 2007; Vandemark, 2007).

Indeed, for some of the study's homeless teenagers the fact that they were in need of crisis accommodation was a dint to their self-esteem, for in their estimation it was an admission that they were incapable of dealing with their changed living circumstances. For instance, one teenager attributed her feelings of low self-worth to the shame, embarrassment and sense of failure she had experienced in not being self-sufficient and requiring accommodation assistance. She described her way of dealing with her need for accommodation assistance as follows:

I came back. It's like hell more embarrassing. When I got here I was like God here I am again. I'm 18 now. God damn it! I pretended like I've never been here before. And I was like I'm new I don't know you (workers), I've never been here before. (Teenager #7)

The study's teenagers conceded that their conception of 'self' had undergone such significant change while homeless that they had over time severed their former connections with both their family and their school mates.

**Regimented routines.** One problem that the teenagers commonly experienced when accessing crisis accommodation was that they had to relinquish some of their new found autonomy if they were to abide by the crisis accommodation unit's routines, rules and curfews. All of the study's homeless complained that the unit's routines were unnecessarily restrictive and offered little-to-no opportunity for independence, self-governance, and decision making. One complained:

I feel confined and regimented now that every part of my life has to run on a schedule. (Male Teenager #1)

Even those teenagers who conceded that the crisis accommodation's routines were there to facilitate the smooth running of the unit still complained that they, the residents, were not afforded any flexibility in terms of their compliance obligations. They maintained that if they were given more lee-way then they would be more willing to comply. Two teenagers explained:

I don't actually mind doing chores, like I really don't mind them. But on Sunday I get really angry and pissed off, coz it's like Sunday...I just want to sleep and chill. (Female Teenager #4)

I want to do my own thing, for once I want to choose what time to get up, what time to go to bed, what time to eat dinner and when to do chores. (Female Teenager #7)

**Strict curfews.** Another assault on their autonomy that the teenagers found particularly irksome was the crisis accommodation's strictly applied curfews.

The main complaints that they had with these curfews were that they were not age-differentiated and they were so early at night that they seriously impinged on their ability to socialise with people outside of the unit. Typically they complained:

Now that I'm 18 the curfews like are still the same when I was 17. I can go to pubs now, I wanna stay there ... and go clubbing and not have to worry about being home at a certain time. (Female Teenager #6)

Curfews are stupid. The night time curfews are way too early. Stops me doing my own thing. I'm going all the way out to Morley tonight and I had to check in for the 5:00pm curfew. By the time I get back to Morley I'll have to come back to make (the night) curfew. (Female Teenager #2)

**Rigid rules.** All of the participants perceived the quantity and breadth of their unit's rules to be excessive. In particular, they complained of the banality of the rules, especially those that prohibited day time access to the crisis accommodation facility. The teenagers remonstrated:

Anyone else living someplace else wouldn't have to live like this, they could do what they want... Having to be out of the house Monday to Friday... It sucks... I don't have work and I have nothing else to do. I have to wait hours to get back in. (Male Teenager #8)

Rules, there are so many! Rules for everything, including lights staying on while watching movies... You should be able to go to bed when you actually feel like going to bed. Coz you shouldn't be forced to go to bed at that time. But like a reasonable

time like before 2:00am. (Female Teenager #4)

Some teenagers thought that while some rules had merit in so far as they safeguarded the residents, they maintained that there were others that existed just to exert control. Even those teenagers who conceded that some of the rules had been put in place to counteract inappropriate behaviour, they still resented the fact that the rule was then applied to all of the residents and not just the errant person:

There are like so many things (like rules for the storing and handling of kitchen knives) I can understand why, but I hate it. Like coz if one person does it (self harm) then everyone else had to put up with it (the rule). And like it sucks. (Female Teenager #5)

Although there was a general grudging acceptance of the rules the teenagers insisted there needed to be some interpretation flexibility. For without some application leniency then the rules caused unnecessary resentment and incited rebellion. One teenager explained:

It's like people are more rebellious in a hostel. It's because of the rules. There are so many rules... (There needs to be)... more leniency, um in life, the curfews and the bed time rules. (Female Teenager #7)

The teenagers stated that any rule compliance leniency that they had experienced within a crisis accommodation unit to date had always been the result of a lone staff member bending the rules rather than any substantive change in the unit's operational policy. For instance:

There is leniency from some workers. Some kinda let things slip if they are not really, really important. Its good, coz like cool, sweet, it's something else we don't have to worry about. (Male

Teenager #1)

The teenagers felt that in the absence of choice it was hard to maintain a sense of autonomy in their life as every facet seemed to be governed by the decrees of others.

### ***The Homeless Teenage Need for Self-actualisation***

Healthy mental growth of an individual's inner core comes about through a process of personal growth towards self-actualisation (i.e., having an inner self-belief that allows individuals to reach their potential, develop an understanding of life and a sense of morality, as well as the ability to set personal goals, resist social pressures, and problem solve) (Beaumont, 2009; Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Self-actualisation is Maslow's (1954) fifth level of hierarchical human need. Attainment of this level is achieved when individuals feel able to accept and express their inner core sense of self and not manifest significant signs of mental ill-health (i.e., neurosis/psychosis; Maslow, 1967). According to Maslow (1967), mental ill-health occurs when an individual's inner core is frustrated, denied, or suppressed. Thus, the antecedents for healthy adolescent psychological adjustment are posited to include the establishment of an identity, individuality, intimacy, and integrity (Beaumont, 2009). The establishment of these psychological attributes are problematic for teenagers living in crisis accommodation as can be seen below.

**Identity.** Nearly all of the participant teenagers spoke about the emotional turmoil they had experienced when accessing crisis accommodation for the first time. In particular, the difficulty they faced in trying to reconcile their pre-homeless moral concepts with the often diametrically mores of the homeless community. One teenager who had altered his pre-homeless concept of self and now identified himself with his new lifestyle explained:

Like my whole attitude has changed. I've kinda changed my

thinking and outlook on life. I do care, but most things (from pre-homeless time) I don't care about anymore. (Male Teenager, #3)

**Individuality.** The difficulty that the teenagers living in crisis accommodation encountered in trying to establish a sense of individuality was that the crisis accommodation staff tended not to 'see' them as individual people, but rather as a cohort of troubled youth. This observation was captured in the following quote:

You're all individuals yet they treat you like you're one stereotype. (Female Teenager #5)

The teenagers suggested:

Instead of having blanket rules for everyone, it should be about individual needs and having different things for different people. (Female Teenager #4)

They [workers] should actually talk to the certain person individually and see what they had, their childhood and treat them individually. (Female Teenager #7)

**Integrity.** Another underlying reason why some of the study's homeless teenagers left the relative safety of the crisis accommodation unit for life on the streets was the unit staff showed no trust or recognition of their integrity. The teenagers cited as an example the standard practice within crisis accommodation policy of closely monitoring their residents to such an extent that it left the residents with no sense of privacy. Once teenager remarked:

Having privacy is kinda hard seeing they come in every hour, it's really hard. (Female Teenager #6)

A second teenager who was disconcerted by the night-time monitoring commented:

I thought I was being invaded. Coz I woke up one night and what's his name (worker) was

coming into my room...and he was like we have to check on you and I was like, what the hell? Him being a guy – checking at night time! (Male Teenager #8)

A third teenager similarly equated his experience of a lack of privacy with staff distrust:

People kept keeping an eye on me. I like to do my own thing and not have people look over me the whole time. It makes me feel invaded and untrusted. (Male Teenager #1)

A fourth teenager felt his privacy had invaded when he was required to disclose not only the circumstances by which he had become homeless, but also personal information regarding his family history, mental health issues and drug/alcohol usage during his entry assessment interview. He explained:

I don't like talking about that stuff, it's really personal and is difficult to talk about especially with someone new. (Teenager #7)

Despite all of the negative experiences associated with accessing crisis accommodation, all of the teenagers concluded that they had also accrued some benefits. For instance, some teenagers had managed over the course of multiple accommodation placements to master new skills or to achieve a school qualification. The general consensus was that while crisis accommodation living was not always an enjoyable experience it did provide a potential pathway out of homelessness. One teenager concluded:

I achieved my year 10 certificate while living there. It was a positive that I actually achieved the thing that I had been trying to by myself for a year and a half. (Female Teenager #2)

Other teenagers acknowledged that their time in crisis accommodation had left



them “feeling more organised” and “less angry,” they were “pretty good at meeting new people” and “more in control” of the future direction of their life. Even those teenagers who identified themselves with the homeless street lifestyle concluded that their stay in crisis accommodation had made them “stronger as a person” because it had forced them “to live with randoms.”

### Discussion

Dalton and Pakenham (2002) contend that “with homelessness comes great adversity” (p. 79) and disempowerment (Farrugia, 2010). It is how young people living on the streets in adverse circumstances deal with the trauma of being disempowered which is a measure of their resilient ability to bounce back from adversity (Taylor, 2012). Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of human need suggests that individuals operating at the lower levels of functioning have a lesser ability to deal with adversity as they are engaged in survival orientated functioning (Taylor, Houghton, & Chapman, 2004). Some support for this assumption comes from Auerswald and Eyre (2002) who, in their study of 20 homeless youth, describe a lifecycle model of homelessness where youths are predominantly concerned with meeting their basic needs and fears.

A hierarchical response to need was evident in the present study’s ethnically diverse cohort of homeless teenagers who, after having their basic physiological needs for food and shelter being met upon accessing crisis accommodation, the teenagers voiced their fears for both their physical safety and their psychological well-being. The fear literature suggests that experiences of acute distress or perceived threat will initiate a ‘freeze, flight, fight, or fright’ adaptive response (Bracha, 2004; Davis et al., 1997). In this regard, the study’s teenagers upon newly becoming homeless recalled how hypervigilant they had been in terms of their being constantly on-guard and alert for

potential danger. The biomedical research would suggest that in this state of hypervigilance the teenagers’ bodily systems have been flooded with norepinephrine, the neurochemical that initiates the human ‘stop, look, and listen’ reaction (Davis et al., 1997). The teenagers’ next remembered response to their homelessness was one of flight. In this regard, they recounted tales of having retreated to a place of relative safety, their bed/room in the shelter. The teenagers maintained that while in this safe place, they stayed in a withdrawal mode of thinking until their flight urges dissipated. The teenagers revealed that once their flight urge had dissipated then their feeling of fear were typically replaced by feelings of anger, which in some teenagers led to an initiation of confrontational ‘fight’ behaviours.

Only when their physical survival needs were (partially) met (e.g., through accessing temporary accommodation) and their flight and fight urges had dissipated, did they start to mingle with and gain the acceptance of the other residents. Through these endeavours, they became acculturated to the homeless street subculture. Such acculturation, according to Auerswald and Eyre (2002), typically occurs through the auspices of a mentor. In this study, the mentors were other more experienced homeless individuals living in sheltered accommodation or on the street who helped provide newly homeless youth with socialisation opportunities. The study’s teenagers revealed that their street acceptance had largely been achieved through a process of conforming to the homeless subculture’s social mores. They stated that it was only by demonstrating their willingness to adopt the ways of the street that they were able to establish bonded friendships and intimate relationships with members of the homeless community. This friendship establishment process provided them with a sense of belonging.

Belonging (i.e., the feeling of being

understood, respected, valued and accepted by peers), is defined in the literature as being a personal involvement in a system or environment which facilitates a strong sense of integration (Faircloth & Hamm 2011; Vandemark, 2007) and prevents and mediates two common afflictions among the homeless, namely, depression and anxiety (Choenarom et al., 2005; Faircloth & Hamm, 2011; Pretty et al., 2006). The ability to establish a sense of belonging and place has been determined to be fundamental to the development of a sense of well-being (Cattell, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008).

While currently little literature exists that expands on the homeless teenage experience of belonging within crisis accommodation situations, the literature does describe the importance of belonging during adolescence. Indeed, it has been suggested that young people who experience a lack of belonging within their family, peer-group and community often turn to the street youth subculture to find an alternative source of camaraderie and belonging (Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Taylor, Houghton, & Bednall, 2010). Pivotal to the adolescent experience of belonging is their acceptance and willingness to conforming to their desired peer-group's interests, values and behavioural norms (Newman et al., 2007). This adoption of their desired peer-group's mores may well explain why this study's homeless teenagers subjugated their former morals and engaged in antisocial and criminal acts so as to gain the acceptance of their fellow homeless peers. Moreover, there actions are consistent with the actions of 35 other homeless youth who were similarly investigated by Martijn and Sharpe (2006). They examined participants' pathways into youth homelessness and found that, in all but one case, crime involvement did not precede the youths' homelessness, but once homeless their crime involvement became the distinguishing factor of the group.

The ability to bond and identity with

others is fundamental to the human need to belong. Interestingly in the present study it was only once the study's homeless teenagers felt accepted that they began to want to gain some control over their lives. However, this newly developed personal autonomy, in many instances, brought them into conflict with their crisis accommodation unit's rigid routines, curfews and rules. This finding aligns with those of other youth studies who have similarly found that hostel/supported accommodation rules, routines and curfews are restrictive in nature, infantilising, generate distrust and limit the development of autonomy in vulnerable adolescents (Danby, Farrell, Powell, & Leiminer, 2006). In this regard, Kryda and Compton (2009) have suggested that the mistrust that frequently occurs between homeless outreach/shelter program operators and their clients occurs mainly because of the incongruence between the services providers' understanding of what it means to be homeless and their clients' needs. Furthermore, the ensuing inflexibility that exists in the interpretation of the crisis accommodation unit's routines, rules and curfews occurs usually an institutional level as some individual staff workers do try to accommodate the youth's desire for autonomy (Dalton & Pakenham, 2002; Danby et al., 2006; White & Wood, 2011). The existence of institutional rigidity in the application of rules is surprising given the wealth of studies that have shown that positively negotiated adolescent outcomes not only increase young people's sense of self-efficacy, but also help protect them against self-esteem distortions and negative cognitions (de Winter & Noom, 2003; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Hudson, Nyamathi, & Sweat, 2008; Newman et al., 2007; Noom, de Winter, & Kork, 2008; Rew, 2008).

The study's fourth finding revealed that the study's homeless teenagers only felt able to gain autonomous control over their lives once they had developed the attributes of

identity, individuality and integrity. Such self-actualisation attributes are crucial to not only dealing with the daily adversity associated with homelessness, but also to attaining sufficient personal resilience to overcome the trauma of homelessness (Cattell et al., 2008). Thus, the degree to which homeless youth are able to rationalise their circumstances and make a decision of whether to return to, or to extricate themselves from, street life on exiting temporary accommodation, depends in part on their higher level cognitive abilities to judge which domain (the street or mainstream society) will provide them with the social capital support resources they need to reach their aspirational goals.

This exemplar study details eight homeless teenagers' accounts of their experiences of residing in crisis accommodation. Society views crisis accommodation as being part of what Gesler (1998) terms the therapeutic landscape wherein individuals (in this case homeless youth) have their health (mental, physical) needs met, thus, facilitating their reintegration back into mainstream society (Moon, Kearns, & Joesph, 2006). However, this study's teenagers have highlighted some problematic areas within the system (e.g., unstable and violent residents; lack of recognition of their needs for personal safety, privacy, affection and intimacy) and conflict between them and the crisis accommodation's staff (e.g., inflexibility in the application of the crisis accommodation unit's routines, rules and curfews). Thus, renewed efforts to foster trust and understanding between homeless youth and crisis accommodation staff are central to reducing youth homelessness and fostering health resilience given that crisis accommodation workers are society's frontline interface with homeless youth (see Kryda & Compton, 2009).

#### ***Limitations of the Study***

A limitation of the present study is its sample size, which does not allow the

findings to be generalised. However, a small sample is recognised as being a functional difficulty when accessing hard-to-reach cohorts (Magnani, Sabin, Saidel, & Heckathorn, 2005). A second limitation of the study is that data derived from the eight teenagers volunteering for the study may be reflective of the views of a subgroup of resilient homeless youth who were able to articulate their experiences and thus may not be representative of those who did not volunteer to participate in the study. Therefore, it is possible that these non-volunteering homeless teenagers may provide a substantively different perspective on their homeless experiences.

#### ***Conclusion and Implications for Future Research***

The findings of this exemplar study, while not directive for policy making, do provide suggestions for future research. Hence, it is the contention of the present authors that homeless youth can only develop higher level future-orientated resilience coping strategies within crisis care when their lower level safety and trust needs are being met. In this regard, further research is needed to explore the experiences of the secondary (couch sleeping) homeless youth cohort to see how their experiences compare with their age-matched peers accessing crisis accommodation. Also, research is needed to determine whether multiple experiences of crisis accommodation reduce or enhance homeless teenagers' ability to develop autonomous control of their lives. In addition, an assessment is needed of the level of understanding among crisis care workers, management, and government/non-government agencies of the hierarchical psychosocial needs of homeless male and female teenagers' living in different geographic and economic settings. It is only through assessing the current status of understanding of the psychosocial needs of homeless teenagers among management and staff that meaningful advances will be made

in the management of crisis accommodation. Finally, the present study although ethnically diverse in composition, has not been able to articulate Australia's Indigenous and migrant populations experience of homelessness, therefore, more research is needed to tease out cultural differences.

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### Author biographies

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## Practice Issues – Interview of Niki Harré by Nicholas Carr

Niki Harré was invited by the Rafto Institute for human rights and Bergen Municipality, and came all the way to Norway from New Zealand, via San Diego. She was also invited to Naples, but could not come this time as she had already arranged to go to The Netherlands and Germany. Niki is Professor of Community Psychology in Auckland, New Zealand, and author of the recently published book, *Psychology for a Better World: Strategies to Inspire Sustainability*, which has resulted in wide debate and positive reactions. She held an engaging talk at the United Nations Climate Conference recently, where this interview took place (October 2013).

**Welcome to Bergen, the west coast capital of Norway! After reading your book, *Psychology for a Better World*, I became curious to investigate the connections between community psychology (CP) and environmental psychology. What effect do you think the climate crisis has had on the development of community psychology as a practical and academic profession?**

Very little as yet. CP tends to build itself around concepts like social justice, poverty, and homelessness and in this way usually limits itself to overcoming human suffering. There is a small movement towards environmental social justice within CP. This is mostly about local pollution issues and how less privileged communities are often the location for toxic industries and waste disposal. CP has not yet integrated the implications of climate change in its professional education and practical work. In any academic discipline, it takes a long time to change the core focus. People have not yet come to terms with the close relationship between climate change and social justice. As a value-based discipline, CP could include ecological wellbeing in its sphere of concern. This would include considering ecological systems as precious and worthy of our care in their own right. Of course we also depend on

these systems for our wellbeing. If we expanded the field of CP to include ecological issues, then we will bring it closer to environmental psychology. CP could also contribute to environmental psychology, because of our understanding of how people work in groups and communities.

**Do you think working with sustainability will attract more psychologists to the profession of community psychology?**

We can expect this to grow in the future, because the climate problems will not go away by themselves. In New Zealand I find there is more professional concern from people in disciplines other than psychology. Many people in the natural sciences want psychologists to be involved, because they understand these problems are about how people think, feel, and behave, but psychologists are lagging behind. This is a pity as CP could contribute a great deal through our understanding of how to work with groups towards positive social change. Our focus on social justice also means we are able to approach solutions in a way that is good for people as well as the environment. As a society, we need to decide what kind of world we want to live in. Do we want a sustainable community or a materially-rich one? Do we want a participatory democracy that respects diversity? We need to build positive visions of the future – as suggested by the CP Julian Rappaport – ‘Tales of Joy’ that attract both our colleagues and communities to be part of the movement for sustainability.

It is easy to teach children to care about wildlife. For example, my daughter is concerned about the effects of rubbish going into the sea because she has been taught it harms sea creatures. Wisdom is holistic knowledge, knowing how things are connected. If we are truly ‘whole’ we will try to avoid harmful or destructive practices. Wise people care for others, both human and non-human.

**Should we join forces to make an impact, across the disciplines of environmental, architecture, and community psychology?**

At my university in Auckland, New Zealand, most staff in the School of Psychology do not engage in environmental issues. As with most psychologists, their priority is to understand people and they do so within their particular specialty. Mainstream modern psychology is more interested in brain imaging than in how people are affecting the environment that sustains them. This is a pity. If we stand alone as a discipline, we are weaker; we need to fly in a flock – then we are stronger and reach further. At my university I work with the environment coordinator and colleagues in geography, anthropology, town planning, law, biology, and engineering on these issues. **If you were to build a European Master of Community Psychology course, should environmental psychology be included?**

Definitely! Or rather we should call it ‘ecopsychology’ – a broader concept that includes other parts of psychology as well. There is an international journal called *Ecopsychology* that is worth looking into. It deals with many issues such as how people benefit from time in nature, and how we are connected to nature at a deep psychological level. Many of our archetypes relate to natural objects and I think it is difficult to argue that people can thrive in a society that is damaging the environment. Our models must be future-based and take into account the changes and long-term effects of climate change. I also feel we need to take a much broader approach than the one advocated by social marketing. This approach suggests we should try and ‘change behaviour’ by using similar techniques to commercial advertising or health promotion. That is, we should focus on the behaviour itself and not worry about what people think. It assumes that we, the experts, know the solution and the goal is to make people behave in accordance with it. I think a CP approach should instead be to get

people and communities acting towards a wide variety of positive solutions and taking ownership of these issues. We should be drawing on communities’ creative solutions, not trying to make people do what we want. The social marketing approach does not threaten the basis of a consumerist capitalist society; it tries to make small changes within that paradigm. I think CP is more adventurous than that! We can aim for a society of inclusion and participation, and working out how we want to live well together on our planet is a great place to start.

We need to teach a new psychology and resist the idea of profit – that is, some people being allowed to extract more value from communities than they put in. Our core competencies should include methods for advocating sustainable lives and building sustainable communities. The pedagogical tools to manage this and teach sustainable practices are many; in my School, only one in eight courses in psychology at the graduate level is concerned with sustainability. The main thing is connecting practices to our hearts and minds. One way to do this is to take on a personal challenge for a couple of weeks – being a vegan, not eating at restaurants, cycling to work, taking the bus, and then experiencing the hazards and difficulties of this change. Action is a powerful tool for engaging and politicising students and ourselves.

**What is your future dream for all psychologists?**

I would love to see sustainability as a core value in all our programmes. We all need to be part of creating a positive future.

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Dwyer, J., Liang, Z., Thiessen, V., & Martini, A. (2013). *Project management in health and community services: Getting good ideas to work* (2nd ed.). Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin. ISBN: 978-1-74331-048-9. 248 pages.

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“Old ways of funding, administering and managing health and community care were swept away in a great wave of change in the last two decades of the twentieth century and the pace of change has only increased since” (p. xxi). So begins Dwyer et al.'s book about project management with a particular focus on the health and community sector. Drawing on the language, research, and frameworks of traditional project management, the authors have a unique way of embedding the particular characteristics of the health and community sector which may affect those projects.

The authors begin by describing the four basic purposes for project management methods in health and community services – the development of new services, projects, or technologies; the improvement of existing services, care processes, work practices, or service delivery methods; the implementation of new organisational structures or systems; and the construction, acquisition, and/or commissioning of new equipment and facilities. They note that many of these projects will relate to change management as it is a feature of the sector. By carefully taking the reader through a journey of the phases of project management, the authors prompt the reader to be prepared to identify gaps, likely areas of confusion, or times when issues may need to be resolved. The book will appeal to community psychologists undertaking project work. This review will consider those features of the book likely to

be of most interest from a community psychology perspective.

When exploring project success, the authors outline the different perspectives from which success might be determined, including the project sponsor, the project manager, and the consumer. They outline 10 critical project success factors identified by research – project mission, including clear goals and direction; top management support; project planning; client consultation (engagement of stakeholders); people management; technical tasks; client acceptance or sign off; monitoring and feedback; communication; and trouble shooting. They also outline four phases of a project – initiation, preparation, implementation, and closure, suggesting that management of these phases does not tend to occur in a linear process but rather as a life cycle of the phases. Importantly, the authors also acknowledge the real world experience of project work and highlight the possibility of underlying factors which can relate to the organisation, the fit between the organisation and the project, industrial issues that the project may encounter as well as stakeholder concerns.

The place of the stakeholder is emphasised in the book with various sections on identifying, including, and managing stakeholders. They define stakeholders as “the individuals and organisations who are actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be affected as a result of the project, or who may exert influence over the project and its results” (p. 111). Their extensive list of stakeholders include sponsors or champions, project manager, consumers or users, partners and allies, performing organisation and project team members. They also state that these stakeholders will usually have not only different, but often competing, agendas. The possibility of a stakeholder taking the project on a tangent based on a whim is

acknowledged. The consumer group is also included as an important stakeholder group and circumstances when staff groups and management could challenge the capacity of consumers to contribute throughout the project is highlighted as a risk when considering stakeholder management.

Another important area of the book refers to evaluation and includes useful definitions of the types of evaluations and frameworks for developing an appropriate and useful evaluation process. The authors stress the importance of building the evaluation framework into the planning process to ensure that the relevant data can be collected throughout the implementation of the project. Pros and cons of an internal or external evaluation are explored as are the realities around the funding required for external evaluations. Considerations about the credibility associated with internal and external evaluations are outlined. A useful table is provided which assists the reader in determining the objective of the evaluation (for example, an impact or goal achievement evaluation or process evaluation), some possible relevant evaluation questions, and examples of the types of measures that would be useful.

A section on change highlights the value of utilising participative approaches to implementing change, particularly when the project has been developed by management as a way to create sustainable change. The authors note how theory suggests that, although directive processes may achieve change quickly, it is more likely that participative change processes will enable a sense of ownership by and involvement of those affected, ultimately leading to more support for the change. Again, the authors are realistic in naming some of the challenges associated with participatory methods to engage stakeholders in change processes. These include time taken in developing and implementing processes. They suggest structures such as project leadership and

participation structures with well-designed processes that “ask the right questions at the right stage” (p. 180) as the best approach to manage the participatory approach to change.

The authors acknowledge the role of power in projects and note that the politics of the organisation and of the project can affect productivity and quality of working life. They label the negative aspects of this as the ‘shadow side’ and note that organisations will always have politics and there will always be a shadow side to projects. The impact of these on the project will depend upon management quality, organisational tolerance of difference and debate, and the development of open communication to reduce the space in which the shadow side may operate. They encourage a willingness to develop skills to recognise the effects of politics, to challenge the negatives, and to turn discomfort into learning in order to respond to politics. Project managers, they note, tend to use influence rather than power, given that generally speaking they do not tend to have strong or stable bases from which to work.

The book culminates in the authors encouraging the reader to take the necessary risks associated with projects but to always be reflective and open to learning throughout the various project phases. They describe projects as places where reflection and learning are always happening and that taking risks can “be tempered through reflection on practice – what worked and what did not – and the ability to recognise the patterns or similarities in past experiences that might help to guide the project team in dealing with a current dilemma” (p. 226). Reassuringly, the book also provides the reader with a range of templates relevant to each stage of the project management process as well as websites and lists of resources for further reading. This ensures that the book not only reflects on current research and contemporary thinking about managing projects but also is a practical tool for those

people in the throes of managing a project. Its particular focus on the health and community services sector ensures that the examples are pertinent to those working in the sector and could assist the reader to pinpoint areas for review or improvement.

The book provides a very useful framework and toolkit for project managers and team members to use throughout the various stages of the project. It will provide opportunities to reflect upon and enable workers to continue to remain motivated and creative in their project work, particularly as it names many of the real situations project workers are likely to face. Its focus on valuing the role of stakeholders, using participatory approaches to developing sustainable change, emphasis on understanding, and working with power in organisations and in finding participatory ways of evaluating the project fits well with a community psychology approach to project work. It will therefore be a useful book which community psychologists will find not only speaks their language but also provides them with a wide range of tools and templates that walk the walk of project management.

Stratton, J. (2011). *Uncertain lives: Culture, race and neoliberalism in Australia*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

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Jon Stratton's *Uncertain Lives: Culture, Race and Neoliberalism in Australia* is a collection of eight essays concerned with the how the 'second stage', as he describes it, of Australia's introduction to neoliberalism unfolded under John Howard's governments. The book examines specific cultural shifts in relation to race, ethnicity, and border and population management. Stratton discusses the cultural implications of how Howard's neoliberal reforms undermined state citizenship by mitigating policies concerned with social groups, such as multiculturalism. Here, Stratton argues, Howard's aim was to reduce the social to an aggregate of competitive individuals engaged in a contractual relationship with the state and the market. This produced the reconstitution of a homogenous 'core' Australian national identity privileging a white and British of origin Christian majority. Such a national identity, Stratton argues, is informed by a deep Australian 'racialised order' that "relativises an exclusionary organisation of the neoliberal state" (p. 4).

The book works very well in providing a critique of how this new 'exclusionary system' operates to exclude those who are deemed not useful to the economic needs of the state. Remaining focused on race, ethnicity, border and migration, Stratton is able to examine the specificities of the forms in which Howard's governmentality excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Muslim Australians from the new 'contractual order' by examining the changing role of prisons. The neoliberal prison is one in which those who are deemed as being of no economic use to the state can

be made invisible, just as the camps for mandatory detention exclude those who seek state asylum. Under Howard, Australia evolved into a 'state of exception' whereby the 'national' could become suspended, akin to martial law, and the detention camp was normalised. Here the meaning of what constitutes the meaning of 'prison' shifts to sit alongside the detention camp with each on either side of the border.

This book provides an important critical analysis of the Howard era exploring the personal implications of economic fundamentalism in the everyday lived experiences of Australians. The collection would sit very well with other works seeking to examine the ways in which other groups, such as sole parents for example, were excluded within under the Howard regime. The book is very accessible and would make a good addition to an undergraduate and postgraduate reading list; in particular, the introduction provides a concise historical overview that would be ideal reading for second or third year undergraduates. Stratton's collection is highly relevant for students undertaking cultural studies, sociology, postcolonial studies, Indigenous studies, Australian studies, criminology, community and social psychology, arts and social science courses.

Harré, N. (2011). *Psychology for a better world: Strategies to inspire sustainability*. Auckland: University of Auckland, 192 pages. ISBN 978-0-473-19304-1 (paperback) and available as a free download from [www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/psychologyforabetterworld](http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/psychologyforabetterworld)

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Niki Harré's book *Psychology for a Better World* is a book about climate change and other big environmental problems, but with a focus on how we can change our own behaviour and influence the behaviour of others, to make sustainable behaviours normal and enduring. Then, we and other species can all flourish.

Harré, Associate Professor in the School of Psychology at Auckland University, teaches applied social and community psychology and has strong research interests in sustainability, citizenship, and political activism. She uses concepts from all these areas of psychology to show the reader how people can better address complex environmental threats, not just as professionals, but as citizens, moral leaders, and community members. And an overarching theme throughout the book, from the field of positive psychology, is the importance of positive emotion and flow in getting and keeping people engaged in sustainability. Positive emotions, argues Harré, encourage creativity, invite people to participate, and make it easier for people to consider change. She quotes Beavan, "If we aren't going to joke around, is the planet even worth saving?" (<http://noimpactman.typepad.com>) and Mitchell, "In the long run a boring system cannot last" (Mitchell, 1988).

Harré dedicates a section of her book to discussing identity and the importance of encouraging 'sustainability identities' in

order to enhance and maintain pro-environmental behaviours. Whilst Harré only skims the surface of the large social science literature on worldviews, ideologies, and the power they have to influence environmental beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (see for example Leiserowitz, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, Smith, & Hmielowski, 2012; Lewandowsky, Gignac, & Oberauer, 2013), she makes a few very important points about the value of identity, concluding that identity matters, and that identity is a virtuous circle: "Identity is created by action. The more we act for sustainability, the stronger our identities as advocates and the more we feel compelled to act for sustainability."

The best parts of the book, I think, are the sections on modelling, copying, and the enormous power of social norms to change people's behaviour. How we think and behave around climate change is very much influenced by our peer group, by what the people around us think and do. "People are social animals, and what we see people doing matters," argues Harré. Most importantly, implying that pro-environmental behaviour is normal has been shown to be a more powerful way to encourage that behaviour than direct pleas to protect the planet. She writes, "Unsustainable behaviours are relentlessly modelled around us. However, the capacity to copy that keeps us doing what we do now can be utilised for the opposite purpose" – for pro-environmental purposes. Being visibly sustainable yourself, and leaving behind as many behavioural traces as you can, is very important. Harré encourages people to make efforts to show their sustainable behaviours – for cyclists to carry their helmets with them into their offices, for workplaces to locate bike racks prominently on the pavement, for each of us to carry around visible signs of our sustainable behaviours. "Modelling is the x-factor that makes one behaviour option rise to the surface; pick me, pick me!"

In addition to leaving traces, Harré also



argues that you strengthen your power as a model if you are able to not only demonstrate the behaviour itself, but also transmit its meaning. This might involve providing explanations for why you do what you do (she does acknowledge that this can be easier to do for your children than for adults, and that finding a way to not sound preachy is one of the challenges!). If you can provide a compelling reason for an action, then it is more likely to catch on.

Harré further argues that demonstrating your sustainable behaviours also shows that there is no gap between what you do as a sustainability advocate and what you do in the rest of your life. And this leads to the final section of the book on morality. Harré bravely leaps in at the deep end, with a daring statement, “Once we know an action is damaging or unjust, we are morally culpable when we undertake that action.” Burning fossil fuels as we feel the temperature rising will be something we will look back on in a few decades and see clearly as a moral wrong.

Moral leadership, explains Harré, is when people openly live their values: When people take the bus or train to an interstate conference rather than fly; when people don't outsource the catering, but commit to sourcing local, sustainably produced food for conferences. She brings in the concept of costly signalling as a way of demonstrating why moral leadership showing a personal commitment to the cause is so powerful. In animals, costly signalling might be a feature that seems counterproductive to their survival – for example, a peacock's highly visible and cumbersome but glorious tail. The very cost of the tail signals something important. Likewise, when an organisation can be seen to make a big effort, one that might cost them something of relative value, to demonstrate their sustainability, this is costly signalling. It encourages us to pay attention to the principles that are being discussed. Harré concludes that we need a lot more moral

leadership – “Imagine how seriously the world would take climate change if the leading climate scientists pledged to give up their cars.” Even better, imagine how seriously the world would take it if politicians or corporations did this!

Throughout *Psychology for a Better World*, Harré illustrates her points with many personal examples from her own years of advocacy, campaigning, and sustainability practices, as well as her work as a psychologist and even her role as a parent. She relates the personal struggles that she, as a long-time sustainability advocate, still goes through in striving to be morally staunch and enact her environmental values, often in the face of considerable inconvenience, risking other people's negative perceptions, and struggling against the status quo. Her person-centred writing style not only makes the book very accessible and easy to read, but gives readers the sense that the author is ally, confidante, mentor and coach on their own sustainability journeys. The book works very well as an engaging, up-beat, how-to, and can-do guide to getting on with the job of changing our own and other's behaviour.

Of course, psychology has much more to contribute to the sustainability debate than what is captured and highlighted in Harré's book. Psychologists have been working on these issues for over 50 years, and have important contributions to make not just in terms of promoting changes in behaviour but in understanding the human causes of environmental problems, the enormous impact that climate threats have on our wellbeing, and the many complex reasons why we are not doing enough, fast enough, to address these massive problems.

And therein lies one criticism of the book. The environmental challenges that we face are far greater and more devastating than portrayed in this book. Whilst there's no doubt that Harré herself fully understands the scale of the problem and the enormous threats that climate change poses to our entire

planetary system, she chooses not to address this head on, focusing instead on the positive. The tension between frightening people with the full truth, so much so that they risk becoming overwhelmed, or tuning out, and wanting to engage and motivate people with positive messages, arises over and over in the social science and environmental and advocacy field.

David Spratt, activist and co-author of *Climate Code Red*, argues this point in a series of recent articles (<http://precariousclimate.com/2012/06/10/stop-saying-yes-bright-siding/>). According to Spratt, if you avoid including an honest assessment of climate science and impacts in your narrative, it is pretty difficult to give people a grasp about where the climate system is heading, what needs to be done to create the conditions for climate safety, and how to avoid increasing catastrophic harm. Harré's book skirts close to 'bright-siding' with its focus on positive solutions to a problem without getting people to examine it fully. According to Spratt, the risk of bright-siding is catastrophe.

*Psychology for a Safe Climate* (<http://psychologyforasafeclimate.org/>), also takes a different approach to Harré. They tackle the difficult questions about why society is failing to respond effectively to the threat of climate change by looking at the impact of conflicted feelings, the temptation to avoid what is appalling to contemplate, and the importance of first coming to terms with deep and complex feelings about the planet, like grief, fear, shame, anger and longing, before being able to take effective action. Unlike Harré's book, they underline the importance of exploring the issues of denial, minimisation, and avoidance. They argue that this is a critical step in understanding the climate problem along with the scale of the human problem, and then being motivated to take sufficient action. In Harré's defence, however, it could be argued that the contrasting approaches of 'positive

psychology' versus 'reality testing' could be applicable at different stages of awareness/motivation. For example, someone who is 'pre-contemplation' might need to be confronted with the harsh facts, whereas someone who is contemplating change might need the positive approach illustrated in Harré's book. And someone who is actively working to change but often despairing might need support in dealing with the grief and loss of the world as we know it.

Despite these limitations, Harré's book remains an excellent resource for activists, psychologists, sustainability advocates, and indeed anyone who cares about sustainability and understands the urgent need for action and change. It's "our turn to inhabit the earth" and we need to do it in a way that enables our species, and the ecological systems we are part of, to flourish.

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## Preparation, Submission and Publication of Manuscripts

### Manuscripts

*The Australian Community Psychologist* publishes work that is of relevance to community psychologists and others interested in the field. Research reports should be methodologically sound. Theoretical or area review papers are welcomed, as are letters, brief reports and papers by newer contributors to the discipline. Contributions towards the four sections of the journal are sought.

*The Australian Community Psychologist* is published twice per year and online and is available via the website of the Australian Psychological Society's College of Community Psychologists' page (<http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/GroupContent.aspx?ID=4395> ).

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This section is for the publication of empirical research reports relevant to community psychology theory, method, and practice. They may be up to 10,000 words, including all tables, figures and references; however, authors should be as concise as possible.

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Lauren Breen

Email: [lauren.breen@curtin.edu.au](mailto:lauren.breen@curtin.edu.au)

If authors experience any difficulty with electronic submission, hard copy materials together with a disc copy should be sent to:  
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14pt, bold, centred, sentence case.

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The heading Abstract should be centred and in italics.

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be 'screen readable'. This means fully legible and readable on screen when displayed at widths that ideally do not exceed about 750 pixels and certainly should not exceed 1000 pixels.

Australia: Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University. Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> September 2011 from <http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/auwbi/survey-reports/survey-017-1-report.pdf>

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Example book:

Montero, M., & Sonn, C. C. (2010). *Psychology of liberation: Theory and applications*. New York: Springer.

Example book chapter:

Fielder, J., Roberts, J., & Abdullah, J. (2000). Research with Indigenous communities. In P. Dudgeon, D. Garvey & H. Pickett (Eds.), *Working with Indigenous Australians: A handbook for psychologists* (pp. 349-356). Perth, Australia: Gunada Press.

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