

A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes

Welfare Review Submission

2014

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About Council of Single Mothers and their Children (CSMC)

CSMC is a state wide community organisation with a membership base of more than 2500 single mother families. CSMC is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to provide telephone support, referral, information and emergency relief to single mothers and their children throughout Victoria and receives close to 3000 calls per year. We have been supporting single mother families and working for positive changes to systems, services and community attitudes since 1969.

This submission is informed by the thousands of calls and contacts CSMC receives each year from single mothers across the state of Victoria. The overwhelming majority of these calls reveal women struggling under the heavy burden of poverty and disadvantage.

This is true even when women are employed, as is the case for many single mothers.

About the writer

Tenar Dwyer has over 7 years experience in Employment Services (JSA and Job Network) delivering real outcomes for highly disadvantaged and very long term unemployed job seekers. Her experience working with women to develop pathways to employment and social engagement was enhanced through her work as Program Manager for the well-received McAuley Works program, assisting women (including many single mothers) experiencing homelessness, mental health breakdown and family violence to improve their lives through meaningful work. As a single mother Tenar understands intimately the many challenges and rewards employment can provide single mother families and contributing to the elevation of women's position in Australian society is one of her primary passions. Tenar joined CSMC as Executive Officer in 2013.

Tenar acknowledges Kerry Davies, CSMC Project Worker, and Jacqui Ng, CSMC Contact Worker for their valuable contribution and assistance in writing this submission.

Overview

CSMC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the interim report, *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes*; however, given the depth of the report, we contend the six week time-frame allowed for submissions is too short, providing too little time to answer question about complex social issues and risks rendering the consultative process ineffective.

While on face value the Four Pillars of the Interim Report are valid and appear to offer a practical overview of the structures required to drive positive social change, the Report was preempted by the release of the federal budget in May, which outlined in stark detail the Coalition government's harsh agenda for welfare reform. The budget left no room for doubt about the ideology driving these reforms and it would be folly to ignore this. It is an ideology that appears to be taken as given by the Reference Group, forming the foundation upon which the Four Pillars of this report rest; however we believe these foundations are fundamentally unsound.

Poverty, in the context of the current political ideology, is viewed as a moral failing of the individual, a weakness of character, which can only be conquered through a punishing regime of sanctions. A profoundly flawed, paternalistic, "spare the rod to spoil the child", world-view that ignores the multiple social and political structures that intersect to compound disadvantage, while failing to recognise its own perverse role in creating those systems.

It is a fallacy to assume people on welfare are lazy and don't want to work. Nor is there is any logic in imagining lives already weighed down by the pressures of poverty will improve by increasing sanctions. Sanctions only amplify disadvantage, inhibiting capacity for individual responsibility and increase reliance on welfare.

Stories emerging out of the UK and New Zealand, where harsh sanctions are now reaping cruel rewards, reveal the truth about life for those living on the edge. Far from exposing welfare recipients as lazy, these stories reveal individuals buckling under the weight of poverty and disadvantage, without the means to overcome the barriers arising from conditions over which they have no control. Closer to home, the 2013 HILDA report reveals Welfare to Work reforms have contributed to increased poverty for one in four single parent families and senior members of the Australian Labor Party have now public recognised they made a mistake in introducing them.

The inadequacy of income support payments in Australia has been highlighted numerous times by multiple agencies across the welfare sector and there is little disagreement on the need for welfare reform. Welfare payments provide an unsatisfactory safety net for vulnerable Australians, leaving too many at risk of negative social and health outcomes associated with long-term poverty.

Indexation of income support is failing to keep up with cost of living increases: A factor we know compounds disadvantages and creates even greater barriers to employment.

Unemployment rates runs much higher than official unemployment figures (when those who are temporarily unable to look for work and those who are underemployed, but still looking for work are factored in) and there is currently one job for every 5 Australians looking for work (ABS 2014).

Increasing stringent requirements and involving greater punitive measures to solve the problem of unemployment (or underemployment) in this context serves only to meet the demands of an ideology that obscures the complex reality of unemployment and poverty in Australia. Increasing sanctions does nothing to combat poverty and will only serve to further entrench disadvantage.

A key contention of the report is welfare spending in Australia is unsustainable and costly despite clear data showing the percentage of our working age population who rely on income support has dropped from its peak of 24.9% in 1997 to 16.7% in 2013. As a percentage of GDP our welfare spending in this country is among the lowest in the OECD. If we take a long-term view, adequate welfare spending will set the building blocks for a more productive and sustainable economy in the future.

In the discussion paper, *Redistribution, Inequality and Growth* (IMF 2014) leading economists suggest there is no case for austerity, discrediting the myth redistribution of wealth inhibits economic growth. Rather, the report determined the impact wealth redistribution (essential for combating inequality) has on economic growth is negligible, while inequality on the other hand is seen as a significant inhibitor.

A dangerous precedent is being set for our country when ideology is being accepted as fact and hard data is ignored or dismissed. Until the false assumptions on which the Four Pillars of the Interim Report rest are addressed, any recommendations made by the Reference group will be unsound. It is impossible for good policy to be developed when the premise underpinning it is essentially a lie.

Pillar One: Simpler and sustainable income support system

The current system for delivering income support is certainly complex and difficult to navigate. So much so Centrelink staff often struggle to understand and apply payments and subsidies correctly. Reforms to simplify the architecture of the income support system and adequately prepare those with the capacity for work to find employment are welcomed.

Fair rate structure

A fair rate structure would include a base payment that is *at least* equivalent to a \$50 per week increase on current Newstart Allowance payments, with supplements based on individual need and circumstance.

The Two-tiered system of Parenting Payment Single and Newstart Allowance (Primary Carer) should be abolished and a common payment given to all single parents. A common payment would not undermine participation requirements, but provides the necessary support single parents need to ensure Australia's children are insulated from the harshest effects of poverty; a priority for all governments.

We welcome the recommendation for a progressive increase to income support to augment the costs of raising and educating children as they grow. This will encourage school retention rates for families who struggle to meet the rising costs of their children's education.

Payments to support women cover the costs of undertaking higher education should be maintained and increased and earning thresholds for single parents should recognise the significantly greater costs they bear in returning work. For single mother families any fair rate must take into consideration the extra barriers and costs they face in finding and sustaining employment.

Family Tax Benefit Part B is a payment that acknowledges low-income families need additional financial support and therefore should not be absorbed into a primary payment.

CSMC strongly opposes any measures that limit access to income support for recipients under 30 years of age and it is our firm position all payments must reflect the true cost of living to afford basic protection from poverty for all Australians.

Common approach to adjusting payments

CSMC recommends all payments be indexed to male average weekly earnings rather than aligning with CPI. Recommending indexation against CPI reveals a lack of political will to adequately address gender variances in income and is in our view, a taciturn acceptance of the income inequality experienced by women. Adjusting payments in line with CPI will also further erode the value of already inadequate payments, leaving more Australians at greater risk of poverty.

Effective Rent Assistance

Housing assistance requires major reform to reflect the important and central role housing plays in maintaining and improving better social outcomes for families. The *Rental Affordability Snapshot* released by Anglicare in April 2014 revealed less than 1% of housing was affordable to income support recipients. Calls to CSMC reveal housing affordability has reached crisis levels for single mother families and women with children are joining the ranks of the homeless at alarming levels.

Single mother families are unable to explore as many housing options as those without dependants and share housing can be a difficult, or even a potentially unsafe option for women with children. Payments need to be flexible and portable, covering private rental, public and social housing and should include private ownership. Effective rent assistance would also include a child supplement to assist with the extra bedrooms required for all children in the family and a single parent supplement recognising the significant rental costs involved with supporting dependents alone.

In his review of the tax system Ken Henry stated: "The maximum rate of Rent Assistance should be increased to assist renters to afford an adequate standard of dwelling. To ensure that Rent Assistance can be maintained at an adequate level over time, the rent maximum should be indexed by movements in national rents, which could be measured by an index of rents paid by income support recipients."

Housing stress and homelessness needs to be meaningfully addressed in close consultation with any welfare reform reviews. Housing stress cannot be addressed by rent assistance alone. Regressive tax breaks, like negative gearing, are essentially welfare for the well off, while dangerously low levels of public and social housing mean the income support system is paying large amounts of money in the form of private rental to landlords who are potentially already receiving tax benefits.

Pillar Two: Strengthening individual and family capability

CSMC agrees there are few more critical factors to improving individual wellbeing and personal agency than access to secure, meaningful work. For single mother families work can make a significant difference to how deeply they experience poverty and it is true ensuring women remain connected to the workforce is important for their long-term financial security.

Not only does employment offer greater personal and financial stability, it can also provide a sense of purpose and dignity to women's lives; however single mothers face significant challenges in returning to work and the costs associated with undertaking paid employment are greater for women with children than for a single person.

Measures to assist women engage with the workforce after having children must account for the cost inhibitors to returning to work; for example childcare costs alone can wipe out most, if not all, benefits women gain by returning to work, even with government subsidies factored in.

Measures must also be targeted toward providing women with opportunities to raise their families out of poverty, providing them with access to education and genuine skills development, while remaining cognizant of the labour market's limited ability to respond to job seekers with greater barriers to employment.

While the report acknowledges the structure of the labour market has changed, with jobs requiring higher levels of education and skills, funding for education is being eroded by our government leaving fewer women with the means to undertake the tertiary qualifications required to meet those demands. The recent federal budget, for example, proposed measures to remove subsidies for single mothers in full time study and outlined plans to cut funding to the JET childcare program; a move guaranteed to limit women's ability to access education and ultimately move into long term, stable employment.

For single mother families the choice isn't about working or not working; with the cost of living and housing so high, most single mothers need to work. They also understand only too well their responsibility to provide for their children. We would argue single mothers, by the very fact they have taken on the difficult role of being sole provider to their children, have accepted more than their share of responsibility and the implication single mothers are lazy because they are receiving income support is not only untrue, it's offensive.

We would also further argue failure to take responsibility does not rest on the shoulders of the parent raising children on her own. At some point our governments and the community at large need to take the spotlight off the parent doing the work and turn it toward the systems and social norms that absolve too many men of the financial responsibility for the children they father. Targeted changes and tougher measures for Child Support payments have the potential to alleviate some of the financial pressures faced by single mother families.

A woman's absolute first priority must be her children and while this doesn't negate the need to work, finding part time work that fits in with caring responsibilities in the current employment market is difficult. For women with no family support it can be almost impossible.

Take Sarah* for example. She is mother to two boys who are both in primary school. Her oldest boy is prone to panic attacks and has been diagnosed with PTSD and severe anxiety disorder as a result of the family violence he witnessed and experienced at the hands of his abusive father. Because of this, Sarah has to be there to drop her son off at school in the morning and pick him up in the afternoon.

For her own and her children's safety Sarah had to move. She doesn't know many people in the community where she is now living and has no family support to rely on. Her ex-husband pays no child support.

Sarah would love nothing more than to find part time work and is doing everything she can think of to keep her skills up, including participating in volunteer work. She's recently applied for a part-time position at her local Office Works and again at Bunnings, but as these organisations require all employees must commit to one night or weekend shift a week, Sarah had to withdraw her applications. Without family support it is impossible for Sarah to work nights or weekends and her children are too young to leave on their own, even without accounting for the medical condition of her son.

Another single mother, Lena*, lives in regional Victoria and works in the Home Care industry. Lena didn't expect she would ever be parenting alone, but like Sarah, Lena's ex-husband was physically, emotionally and financially violent. Her ex-husband is self employed and has successfully found ways to minimise his income by running his business in his new wife's name, so Lena is lucky if she sees any child support. When she does receive child support it is rarely paid in full.

Lena's daughter is in primary school. There are no before or after school facilities and Lena's job requires her to drive distances up to an hour away from her home. She relies heavily on the support of her elderly father and her friends to drop off and pick up her daughter during the week.

Some mornings Lena gets up at 5:00am to get ready and get her father's house in order to drop her daughter off, before driving more than 100 kilometers to see her first client for the day at 8:00am. Lena isn't paid for the hours she's on the road driving between client's houses, but driving these distances is necessary as many of the clients she is responsible for live in remotely or outside of the major towns.

She worries because her father recently suffered a stroke, which has impacted his memory and makes it harder for him to help out. The guilt and the anxiety she feels can be overwhelming and Lena worries what will happen if her father has another stroke, or something happens to her daughter and she is too far away to do anything.

She is grateful she has friends who are willing to help out, but relying on her friends requires a reciprocal arrangement, which can be exhausting and challenging. The work is physically and emotionally demanding. By the time she gets home, cooks dinner and helps her daughter with her homework, Lena is exhausted.

Lena wants to work. In fact, Lena has a mortgage to pay and has no choice but to work. To ensure she is able to maintain her hours Lena must take every shift she is offered. Any refusal is likely to lead to the agency penalizing her by withholding work – a fate Lena has seen other Carers suffer.

Without regular shifts Lena wouldn't be able to make the mortgage payments on her tiny house, which is the one security she feels she has managed to ensure for herself and her daughter. Because her hours fluctuate quite significantly (and she rarely sees any child support from her daughter's father) budgeting can be a challenge. She's only just managing to keep on top of her mortgage payments and she knows it will only take one thing, such as her car breaking down, or an emergency repair on her house to put Lena in financial crisis. Lena is terrified of what the cuts to government income support will mean for her family.

Karen*, another single mother, recently made the transition to Newstart from Parenting Payment. Karen is studying full-time to complete the final year of her Law degree and she also works one day a week as a medical receptionist.

While she was on PPS Karen's income was too low to affect her payments, but now she is on the lower Newstart payments her allowable earnings have been reduced, compounding her loss even further. On top of this Karen is no longer eligible for the JET Childcare supplement and she is facing the very real prospect of having to give up on her education right when the finish line is right within her sight. Karen knows without her degree she will be stuck in dead-end jobs for the rest of her life, giving her little opportunity to help her kids gain their own financial foothold in the future.

Jennifer* spent 10 years married to the father of her three children – a well respected business man and active member of his community who spent most of their marriage terrorising Jennifer and her three children behind closed doors. For the past two years Jennifer has been in and out of family court countering her ex-husbands claims she is an unfit mother and fighting to retain custody of her children, who she is desperately trying to protect. She is not eligible for Legal Aid because her ex-husband pre-empted her leaving and deliberately made his own inquiry, knowing this would prevent Jennifer from accessing legal support. Jennifer's husband on the other hand, is well resourced and can afford to hire a good attorney.

Jennifer could not have considered leaving her husband if she wasn't eligible for Parenting Payment and Family Assistance and she is incredibly grateful for the payments she receives from Centrelink. She has every intention of getting back to work once she has dealt with her legal issues, but because she can't afford a lawyer all her spare time is taken up with her Family Law issues and taking on a job now would risk her custody of her children.

All of these women are hardworking women and dedicated mothers who want the best for their kids. Their stories represent common themes CSMC hears from single mother families who are doing everything in their power to keep their heads above water. All of these women want nothing more than to love and protect their kids and give them the best possible start at life.

*All names have been changed and identifying details removed

Prioritising children

It's important for the role of single mothers as parents not to be lost in the push to increase women's workforce participation and CSMC would encourage the Reference Group to recognise the importance of prioritising children's care and to avoid placing unreasonable expectations on single mother families. Work that is inflexible and doesn't recognise women's responsibility to their children is costly, not only to their families, but also to the community in the long-term.

Despite what many in our community and government believe, it is rare for single mothers not to consider the impact their choices will have on their children and the decision to return to work is no different. Statistics consistently show single mothers' workforce participation increases as children become older and more independent and employment rates for single mothers are only slightly lower than that of married mothers (ABS).

Women comprehend the benefits of working and most single mothers do eventually return to work; however these women rightly believe working should not come at a cost to their children's wellbeing. Nor should it force them into further hardship.

The vulnerability of women and children to poverty is compounded by joblessness and it is widely acknowledged children growing up in jobless families have poorer outcomes overall; however unemployment is only one element in a multitude of societal structures and underlying social inequalities that inhibit women's overall economic and social wellbeing. Ultimately however, when women are forced to prioritise work over their children's wellbeing it's their children who pay the price.

Family violence

One of the greatest threats to women and children's wellbeing is family violence. Among the thousands of calls CSMC receives from single mother families each year, family violence stands out as the most common theme for why women find themselves parenting alone.

Women don't enter relationships expecting them to fail and the choice to parent alone is rarely made lightly. The decision to become parents is not generally made by a woman alone and men's involvement in the process of creating children doesn't need to be spelled out. What does need to be spelled out however, is how often violence enters relationships when a woman is most

vulnerable, such as during pregnancy or an extended illness, when she is reliant on her partner for emotional and financial support and the effects violence can have on children.

Despite the overwhelming evidence showing economic stability has a far greater impact on positive outcomes for children than the family makeup many in our community still doggedly cling to the notion of tradition marriage as the ideal family structure. Society places enormous pressure on women to stay in relationships, even if this means risking their own wellbeing and safety and too often it is women who bear the burden of protecting this institution. On the other hand little is done to protect women or address the social norms that allow men to physically, emotionally and financially control their wives and partners.

The damage family violence does to women and children has been well documented. The broad, long-term impacts of violence on cognitive functioning, emotional and physical health, and financial wellbeing of women and children has been established through numerous studies both here in Australia and overseas.

Leaving a violent relationship takes great courage, especially for women with children, who more often than not face the prospect of prolonged hardship and discrimination as a single parent. When women do leave it is often fear for their children's safety that motivates them and the ability to access parenting payments is an important element facilitating women's ability to escape the violence.

Crisis payments provide some immediate financial assistance for women escaping violent relationships; however the overall continued erosion to income support payments by successive governments, along with reduced funding for services, means many women and children are being left with fewer and fewer avenues of escape from men's violence.

Income management

A particularly insidious aspect of family violence is the financial abuse that can penetrate women's lives long after they have ended a relationship. Financial violence can be subtle and is often perpetrated by men who society wouldn't necessarily class as violent; however as tool for wielding power and control in women's lives financial violence cannot be underestimated, and the role it plays in women and children's lifetime experience of poverty is significant.

CSMC views the government's proposed income management strategy effectively as an extension of the same paternalistic, power mechanism used by men to control women in their intimate partnerships. Just as financial violence in relationships violates the basic human right to self-determination, income management undermines an individual's right to independence.

CSMC fundamentally opposes the extension of Income Management. It is a failed system that further entrenches poverty, discourages personal responsibility and costs the government taxpayer dollars that could be better spent on targeted payments and service provision. Ultimately, income management is nothing more than a Band-Aid masking deeper social problems and stands in direct contradiction to the ideology of individual responsibility that forms the foundation of this report.

Mutual Obligation

The report acknowledges mutual obligation needs to align with labour market opportunities, to develop individual capacity for self-reliance and provide skills for employment. This is a view CSMC supports, but it is a view that is at odds with the realities of Work for the Dole.

As Minister for Employment under the Howard government, Tony Abbott made it clear the goal of Work for the Dole was not to develop skills to better equip job seekers for employment but a tool to effect behavioural change; essentially busy work designed to 'punish' job seekers for their perceived laziness.

Many single mothers already volunteer at their child's school or local community group and actively contribute to society in a variety of ways. Others are engaged in education that will improve their skills and are taking important steps toward reducing their and their children's reliance on income support over the long term. Many single mothers are also carers for elderly parents or adult children with disabilities.

Mutual Obligation doesn't recognise many of these activities. Women who have been building their skills through volunteer work and networks or caring for family members, providing a genuine benefit to the community, are being forced into meaningless Work for the Dole activities that benefit no one.

There is currently no educative aspect to the Work for the Dole program and evidence suggests it can have a detrimental impact on a job seekers ability to gain employment and increase the length of time they are reliant on welfare. This fact seems to be lost on the government.

The 'hassle and help' philosophy driving mutual obligation and Employment Services has become more hassle than help, but women don't need to be 'hassled' into work. They need help: To get a better education, to access affordable childcare, to find work that provides opportunity for skill development and growth, while respecting her role and responsibilities as a parent, and an effective tax margin that makes working worthwhile.

Affordable childcare

Childcare costs represent one of the most significant expenses for women returning to work or study. Long day care can cost anywhere up to \$180 a day and while government subsidies do take some of the pressure off, for women on low wages the out of pocket expenses can negate any financial benefit they might gain by returning to work. Sometimes it can even leave them worse off.

Accessing affordable childcare, including long day care, family day care and Out of School Hours care is vital to women's engagement with the workforce, but for women working outside normal hours (i.e. nurses and shift workers) regular childcare is not an option and access to affordable in home care needs to be made available.

The AIFS report into early childhood education (Baxter and Hand 2013) revealed young children who access childcare earlier benefit in terms of cognitive and social development. Positive outcomes in health, learning and behavioural development are shown to be a direct and measurable result of children's early engagement with quality programs. These outcomes are particularly valuable for disadvantaged or vulnerable families.

Pillar Three: Engaging with employers

CSMC acknowledges the important role employers play in providing the jobs that have the potential to improve outcomes for people on welfare; however without addressing the cultural and social prejudices limiting access to meaningful work for disadvantaged job seekers there can be no further progress.

The discrimination single mothers and other disadvantaged job seekers face when looking for work can't be swept under the carpet. Nor can it be fixed simply through wage subsidies or increasing sanctions to individual job seekers. A cultural shift needs to occur within the wider community and among employers to understand and value the need for flexibility in the workplace.

Responsibility lies with employers to recognise the changing nature of the workforce and to adapt accordingly. Applying further sanctions to individuals is not only ineffective, it will ultimately lead to further hardship and increase the likelihood of long-term employment.

Employment Services

While the report does recognise the need for reform in employment services, the focus is still on changing the assumed attitudes and behaviours of the individual. This constant and unevaluated scrutiny of individual responsibility ignores the failure of Employment Services to properly equip job seekers to look for work and provide them with the skills that will increase their chances of lifting themselves out of poverty.

One of the greatest obstacles is the ESS Contract itself. Indenturing employment services to private contractors has created a system where job seekers have lost their individuality and yet are still being held individually accountable. The primary customer of employment service providers is not the job seeker; it is the Department with the secondary customer being the employers, leaving job seekers as no more than the commodity through which income is derived.

With a limited pool of long term unemployed and job seekers with significant barriers to employment (representing the highest margin of return for effort) the only viable way for a Job Service provider to ensure a reasonable profit margin is for fewer consultants with higher caseloads to churn job seekers into jobs as quickly as possible. To be feasible, the JSA and DES modes rely on a steady flow of job seekers, who can be placed into short-term jobs and recycled through the system multiple times. This, along with the administratively heavy compliance requirements of the contract,

leaves little room for targeted assistance and job seekers are paying the price. Assisting job seekers to overcome their barriers to work and enter long-term employment requires a highly individualized approach that is time intensive and costly, and is therefore the first casualty in the bid to reduce costs.

It's important to note, the issue is not so much about the need for businesses to operate at a profit, but the expectation they should not be chasing the dollar or focusing their attention on activities that represent the greatest value for money. The ESS and DES contracts compound this issue by a) not putting the money where we want providers to go (i.e. rewarding companies on quality service to job seekers and genuinely increasing individual capacity for employment), and b) establishing reporting systems that allow both Department and providers to be removed from the understanding numbers on spreadsheets represent real people, with real issues in highly individual circumstance and very diverse needs.

Wage Subsidies

On the surface wage subsidies make sense: Incentivising employers to give people a chance to prove their value in the role, which they may have otherwise been excluded from looks like a good idea.

It is our experience, both in our collective involvement as customers and workers within ESS, that employers are not being appropriately screened. Wage subsidies are being offered to employers without a firm contract in place to ensure the job seeker don't lose their jobs once the wage subsidy period has expired.

It's important to note DEEWR's own review of ESS (2013) demonstrated only around 25% of employers were willing to engage with government contracted employment services more than once. Employers who do maintain an ongoing engagement with employment services tend to be those offering low caliber jobs with little prospect of job security. These employers also tend to be well aware of the participation requirements and sanctions imposed on job seekers for refusing work and many exploit this to their own advantage, effectively trapping job seekers into unsuitable low-paid work.

Tracy's* situation is a perfect illustration: A single mother with two teenage boys, Tracy was placed in employment with a cleaning company by her JSA provider. Initially Tracy was advised the job paid just over \$18.00 an hour, but what she wasn't told was she was being paid as a contractor and as

such she was responsible for buying her own cleaning supplies, covering her travel expenses between jobs and paying her own taxes, including submitting BAS statements. She was required to have her own insurance and pay her own superannuation.

Tracy had received no training from her JSA to support her to operate as a contractor and after accounting for her expenses she essentially walked away with a wage that equaled around \$10 - \$12.00 an hour; however her Family Tax Benefit was being deducted based on the rate her 'employer' was paying her. Meanwhile the employer was receiving a substantial wage subsidy from the JSA provider for Tracy.

The employer expected Tracy to pick up other workers and taxi them around with her to jobs, but was not provided with any additional funding to cover her costs and on days when another worker was not available Tracy was expected to do the job of both workers. She was not compensated for this.

When Tracy tried to negotiate with her employer for better conditions her requests were ignored. Tracy complained to her JSA provider who did nothing to support her so she rang her employer to let her know she was resigning due to the conditions of employment. The employer responded by telling her she would contact Centrelink to advise them Tracy had voluntarily left employment, knowing full well this would result in an automatic eight week suspension.

Tracy tried to discuss the situation with her JSA provider but they made it clear they would back the employer over Tracy. Tracy contacted DEEWR to complain but was told because the JSA provider had a signed declaration from the employer that Tracy was employed (and not a contractor) she would face a suspension if she chose to leave her job. This left her with few options.

Pillar 4: Building Community Capacity

Building community capacity and engaging the community to create opportunities for employment and social participation is effective in driving positive social change, but it requires a considerable investment from government to achieve it.

The recent federal budget seeks to wash the government's hands of this responsibility by reducing its commitment to fund vital services that support disadvantaged Australians, including housing support and services for women and children escaping family violence.

These services and others like them are in the best position to develop models of engagement for the individual groups they represent. An example would be to embed employment programs within mental health, homelessness and family violence programs to provide a holistic support model capable of addressing multiple issues at the same time.

This has been done effectively by a number of organisations, including the McAuley Works program (developed by the writer), which supports women experiencing mental health issues, homelessness and family violence to gain meaningful employment.

Programs like this one are time intensive and costly however, requiring an investment from the government that encompasses a longer-term view and a refining of the definition of outcomes that includes a commitment to the genuine, *lasting* improvement of an individual's capacity for self-agency. Sadly, this is a commitment governments including our current Coalition government have shown little appetite for.

Conclusion

In closing, CSMC would like the Reference group to acknowledge single mother families in Australia are already doing it tough and welfare reforms like those proposed in the May federal budget have the potential to impact their families for generations. By ignoring the systems and social norms that exist to work against women (and ultimately nullify any effectiveness individual responsibility might otherwise have) the deeper truths about why women are forced onto welfare are not being addressed and the support needed for single mothers to find work and raise their families out of poverty is ultimately being denied.

In 2014 taking on responsibility for raising children shouldn't leave women vulnerable to poverty; neither should a woman's economic security be tied to her marriage status.

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