

HOLLINGWORTH TRUST LECTURE

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We have a hard road ahead of us and we have set ourselves a difficult challenge: to see if we can change the future for our currently dysfunctional society in Cape York Peninsula. To see if we can change direction so that our people can rise up in the world, a world where our current position is at the lowest and most miserable bottom end.

The first part of the journey down this difficult road, was to get our thinking straight. To reflect upon and better understand the nature of our predicament as a people. We concluded that there needed to be a radical break with our prevalent thinking, which had degenerated into a justification and perpetuation of defeatism, passivity and victim-hood in our society. Our people stand in great need for a more vigorous outlook, based on an unstinting but unromantic belief in our potential as a people – and we need to jettison much of the insipid thinking that has characterized much of what has constituted ‘progressive’ thinking in indigenous policy. Too much of this thinking was plainly wrong – we should long ago have woken up to the lack of achievement and indeed the worsening of our circumstances under these progressive nostrums. Our confusion and hesitation have cost us, because our social problems have gotten out of hand.

I do not wish to repeat the analysis that I have set out elsewhere in relation to the nature of our passive welfare predicament. Across the full range of policy thinking about our people’s affairs, there are ruling nostrums that are fatally flawed. Some of the misconceptions are subtle – but profoundly decisive. I will quickly reiterate some examples of this wrong thinking:

- it is true that our people are frequently victimised – *but to see ourselves as victims weakens us*, it makes our people resign themselves to continued victimisation (whilst the fewer apparently capable people defend them as victims)
- racism is a terrible burden and impediment that our people are forced to endure – *but we must not make it our disability*, otherwise it debilitates us and succeeds in its purpose of destroying our resolve to survive and prosper as a people
- the welfare safety net exists as a universal entitlement of all citizens – *but we don’t have a right to languish at the dependent bottom end of society*, we instead have a right to a fair place in the real economy (ie. a greater right)
- everything we do must be “culturally appropriate” – but in practice “culturally appropriate” usually means substandard in terms of quality, expectation, performance and achievement
- it is true that the ultimate explanation of our parlous condition is our history, our dispossession and consequent trauma – but these explanations frequently do not confer ready solutions, other than to reiterate the responsibility of Australian society to assist our people to rise out of our problems and to take our rightful place in our country. Rather there are more immediate explanations of our problems – passive welfare dependency, grog and drug addiction – which require, and are amenable to, practical resolution in the present.

As I have said, the first step in our enterprise in Cape York was to confront our poor thinking. This will be an ongoing process. The leadership that is developing and the new thinking that is being shared and generated amongst community members and community leaders, is critical. This leadership must be encouraged and re-developed at the family level: because that leadership did exist in earlier times – it is just that it has broken down as our problems have overwhelmed us.

Where is our thinking come from? Fundamentally, we looked to what our older people were saying. Those people who had lived in the real economy of traditional society or the old rural economy before the coming of passive welfare. The connection between our economic passivity and our social problems was well known to these people. They understood the need for us to get our young people into work and into the real economy. They spoke with alarm about the breakdown of responsibility and respect in our society, and in despair about the increasing velocity of the epidemics of grog and then drug addiction that have taken hold.

But if we get our thinking straight, or if we are at least are prepared to question and to see failed thinking for what it is – what then do we do?

A fundamental belief underlying what we are trying to do in Cape York is that we will not prevail over our social problems until and unless we confront our economic passivity. No amount of resources and government and non-government service delivery will solve our social problems as long as our people are economically passive.

This means work. Vigorous lives are underwritten by vigorous engagement in life through some form of work – production, creativity, self-reliance and personal responsibility. For a people to remain in a perpetual state of non-work is to consign such people to a self-perpetuating state of social dysfunction. This is no radically new insight. It is a universal human truth.

But how are we going to turn our analysis into practical changes?

1. Cape York Partnerships

The Queensland Government is working with us in Cape York Peninsula on what is called “Cape York Partnerships” – and our objective is move our people beyond passive welfare dependency. It is enterprise in which we are seeking community, government and business partnerships.

Cape York Partnerships is an undertaking founded on the belief that we need to move towards a more entrepreneurial approach to our social needs. This means we need to leave behind the failed social service delivery methods of the past – with its focus on needs and problems and on bureaucratic service delivery and management of passive (and hopeless) people – to an opportunities-oriented approach.

We are used to thinking of people with entrepreneurial skills working exclusively in the private sector, where the ability to sense new demands and re-configure resources to meet these new demands can bring great rewards to the imaginative entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship requires risk-taking and risk capital, both seen as impossible in the public sector.

But is it necessarily so, that all visionary opportunists have been drawn to big business? We think there is a great potential for innovation outside the corporate world. Indeed, we think there are great tasks lying ahead of us, that can only be tackled by a new kind of entrepreneur, which cuts across the traditional boundaries between the public, private and voluntary sectors of our society.

The social entrepreneur is somebody who manages to mobilise the under-utilised common resources in order to achieve lasting change. But the main assets the social entrepreneur are creating and working with are relationships. Unexpected relationships between members of the local communities, staff of government structures, at all levels, business people, politicians, anybody who has an interest in social development where it was thought not to be possible.

There are people who want to take on this role, and there are people in the communities who will be inspired by them. These things are beginning to happen in many countries, where the public sector faces the same challenges as in our country.

The social entrepreneurs will mobilise and concentrate public resources that are split between different specialised departments. They will form alliances, a network of support from business and philanthropic organisations.

We need social entrepreneurs working in the communities who encourage, excite, inspire, come up with new ideas, coax new ideas out of people, think in new ways, get people motivated, assist – but not people who serve our people and do things for them that they should be doing themselves. We need social entrepreneurs not public servants! How do we find them? How do we encourage a new approach, a new mentality on the part of people who are supposed to be facilitating change on the ground level?

It is a matter of *new thinking*. People working in ‘community development’ at the ground level must be infused with this new thinking. After all, they are the people who must spark the new entrepreneurialism in the way we approach our problems and opportunities. They are the people who are going to implement the new entrepreneurial methodology.

The main quality of such social entrepreneurs will be their belief in the capacity of our people. There must be absolutely no hesitation on this. They have to know our potential as a people such that they will never presume that our future lies in other people – least of all the social entrepreneur – “saving” or “serving” us. They will harbour not a skerrick of racist presumption about our people such that their expectations of our people will be less than the expectations they might have for themselves or their own kin. They will be alive to double standards and eschew them when the standards that are sought to be applied to our people are just excuses. This is not to say that they will not be aware of and sensitive to genuine cultural differences – but they will be equally aware that ‘cultural differences’ is more often than not used to justify poor performance and substandard expectations.

To avoid creating relationships of dependency and passivity, the social entrepreneur will have strong thinking to guide his or her role. They will face situations where they will be under pressure to do things in the ‘traditional’ way – through ‘service delivery’, rather than maximum self-service. Many social and ideological pressures will be brought to bear, but the social entrepreneur will resist returning to the old ‘saviour/servant’ model of leadership.

How are communities going to find such social entrepreneurs?

This where partnership with the business community is essential. The business community harbours entrepreneurs, who, if they turned their talents, experience and networks to social enterprise, could help to transform it from a problems management services into an opportunities-seizing businesses.

We need a recruitment facility to find good resource people to work in community development in Cape York. The difficulties in recruiting people to remote locations mean that the pool upon which communities can draw is extremely shallow. The quality of people currently available to communities is terrible.

Such a facility would form links with overseas aid organisations and the business sector and would network with them to recruit high quality people to work in our communities. The recruitment agency will work with Cape York organisations to actively promote Cape York as a region where we actually have a genuine conviction that our problems can be overcome and our opportunities can be seized.

As well the recruitment of external resource people to work in the communities, the proposed recruitment facility should also aim to provide job search support to Cape York people who wish to find employment outside of the Cape. If Cape York people wish to move to urban centres like Cairns, for reasons of undertaking training or studies, for supporting students attending educational institutions, or for health reasons, or because they want to participate in sporting competitions or they simply want to live away from their community for a while – then they should be assisted in finding employment.

We need a facility which is dedicated to finding job placement opportunities for our people and to work with the private sector in locating opportunities and supporting our people in taking them up.

For school leavers and our young people about to enter into their working life, it may be beneficial for them to have access to work experience and jobs away from home. We need a facility to assist communities, families and individuals in finding job opportunities for them.

It is important to understand that our emphasis on social entrepreneurship means that our Cape York Partnerships is not aimed at creating new bureaucracies.

2. Social entrepreneurialism and social order

My advocacy of intolerance of illicit drugs and alcohol abuse and associated behaviors has led to suggestions that I am proposing authoritarian policies for our communities.

Similarly, commentators and politicians have *assumed* that our proposals to deal with our passive welfare income transfers from government involves a paternalistic pooling of funds by communities as an alternative to the current disaster.

Let me correct these two misconceptions about what we are trying to do in Cape York.

I have previously spoken about the primary importance of our people in Cape York confronting our overwhelming grog and drug problem, and the inextricably related problem of the breakdown in social order. I have argued that there is an urgent need to restore social order in our communities and these problems of addiction and violence will not be overcome if we simply believe that they are just “symptoms” of underlying issues. These dysfunctional behaviours must be confronted as problems of behavior.

The requirement of social order is not inconsistent with social entrepreneurship and greater freedom and devolution of responsibility for families and individuals in our communities. We are in fact advocating greater devolution of responsibility and resources to families away from community and official governing structures – so that families can take initiative and seize opportunities. But the community and government have a responsibility to ensure there is social order. How can families and individuals take up their responsibilities and opportunities when there are people selling sly grog or dealing drugs with impunity to their children, or where the communities are paralyzed by a culture of violence and social irresponsibility? The grandmothers and other sober and responsible people need to be supported in their desire to

have peace and freedom from threats and abuse. Except in severely dysfunctional communities, the people who desire social order are usually in the majority – it is just that they are at a loss to deal with the problem behaviors of their relatives and family members, because grog and drug addiction socially embedded in community life.

My point is that if we are to get on top of our grog and drug problem – the restoration of social order is imperative.

Many of our social problems will in fact be overcome as a byproduct of our people taking up positive opportunities. If we adopt an entrepreneurial approach to our social needs, we will find that by taking up opportunities we will also solve problems.

However, there are some problems that will need to be addressed as problems of behavior. Grog and drug problems will not just be solved by making positive opportunities available to people. It will require the establishment and enforcement of standards of social order.

When I say “social order”, I mean what progressive people might also understand to be ‘Aboriginal law’. Whilst progressive people might instinctively recoil from talk of ‘social order’, they would no doubt support the recognition of Aboriginal law. What I mean is that the Aboriginal values and relationships which constitute Aboriginal law must be enforced so that social order is reestablished in our society.

The second misconception concerns what we propose in relation to the management of welfare transfers. We are developing a trial of Family Income Management in three communities in Cape York.

Contrary to assumptions that have been made about our proposals, Family Income Management is not a community welfare pooling or voucher system – but rather it is about family budget management. Something that mainstream families do because they have the facilities and support services to do it.

It is about allowing local income families to voluntarily pool and manage their income as a household, nuclear family or extended family (it's up to them to define the "family"). The system aims to address three basic facilities that remote people in Cape York currently do not have:

- the need for proper banking facilities to save money and pay accounts through automatic deductions and payments. These are income management facilities that people in the mainstream take for granted.
- the need for loan facilities. Banks won't give low income people credit, and the only access people have is to expensive hire purchase finance. We propose to establish access to joint loan facilities where families take out joint loans, rather than just individual loans.
- the need to have access to goods and services. When people save money and want goods and services, they need to be linked up with providers of quality goods and services. So we are looking at on-line catalogues and establishing purchase facilities with suppliers and brokers.

The responsibility therefore falls to families to manage and make decisions about their pooled funds. They may decide to manage 50% of their income, and leave to individual members the remainder as discretionary income. But the system will ensure that those family members who are currently spending all of their money in a discretionary way whilst other family members

are paying the bills and buying the food – make a contribution. Families will have financial advisors available to them to provide advice on budgeting and planning.

The Family Income Management system we propose does not therefore take responsibility away – rather it is aimed at building responsibility at the family level. Reinforcing family responsibility and encouraging personal income management. And it can be done on a completely voluntary basis.

We believe that much can be gained by families if they have access to income management facilities. It is possible to change the nature and impact of welfare transfers – if we establish opportunities for families to manage their money to achieve maximum benefit. At the moment our welfare income is like water hitting a concrete pavement in high summer – it just hits the ground and evaporates almost instantaneously. At the present time in Cape York there is an extremely efficient system of canteens, taxi services, high-priced shops with poor-quality products, hire purchase companies, dodgy insurance and superannuation companies, drug dealers, sly grog sellers and gambling schools – that take the welfare income money out of the families and out of the communities within 24 or 48 hours. Family Income Management will allow families to confront this waste and work towards retaining the full benefit of the income support they receive.

3. The role of the business community in welfare reform

Let me now turn to what I see as the role of the business community in the welfare reform process.

In the era of welfare reform there is a lot of talk of “community/business partnerships”, “social coalitions” and “business philanthropy”. Business has been cajoled into more philanthropy and unfavorable comparisons have been made between the levels of corporate contributions in Australia versus the USA and elsewhere.

Before we go too much further, we need to be clear about what role the business community will play in welfare reform. There are three kinds of contribution that business could make:

1. disinterested financial support
2. contacts/networks/opportunities/mentorships/expertise/advice to support people to get out of welfare dependency
3. interested financial investment in enterprises that will provide opportunities for welfare recipients to get out of dependency

As to corporate philanthropy in the form of charitable financial contributions, we should not pretend that the corporate sector will provide the capital necessary to support welfare dependent people and to help them to get out of dependency. We should be very clear that governments must provide the capital investment for welfare reform. It is through the taxation system that the corporate sector contributes to government investment to disadvantaged people in disadvantaged areas.

The business community’s financial contribution will always be marginal compared to the needs of those dependent upon government social investment. Rather the business community can make strategic contributions to encourage innovation and the development of social entrepreneurial approaches to welfare reform. Business working in partnership with the community sector can lead welfare reform by developing new approaches that risk and innovation-averse governments are too slow or reluctant to adopt. The business community can and should support innovation and the development of social entrepreneurship.

In acknowledging the fact, the business sector will never seriously finance welfare reform through their philanthropic contributions – it is important that government does not pretend that such a shift of responsibility from government to the private or voluntary sectors can and is taking place. It cannot and is not.

As to the second form of contribution, from my experience with business partnerships and from what business people say themselves, whilst businesses are not willing to provide financial contributions in the form of charity, they are prepared to provide non-financial contributions – which are very valuable in themselves. This is where mentoring, employment and training opportunities, advice, networks, contacts, support and other kinds of valuable leverage – become extremely valuable resources for people who currently have no networks, no experience and no opportunities.

And of course, the third form of contribution is another vitally important area for partnership, where businesses are encouraged to enter into relationships with welfare dependent people and locations, to invest in mutually beneficial business opportunities. In these cases, businesses generate opportunities for disadvantaged people and locations in their own interest. Governments should be developing strategies that encourage and support this form of business partnership with indigenous communities.