

Ken Myer Lecture  
26 September 2002

## Achieving Fairness in Australia

**The Hon Fred Chaney AO**

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I acknowledge the traditional owners of the Canberra region, the Ngunnawal people, and their continuing contribution to this region and society. I note with pleasure that we have adjacent to the National Library a place set aside as Reconciliation Place which in turn acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners of this area. May Reconciliation Place become, in time, a symbol of the reconciliation of all Australians to a common destiny worked out in mutual respect, a place which recognizes our history in all its facets and which helps us put our past failings behind us.

It is an honour to be delivering a lecture which is named after Kenneth Myer. Unlike others who have delivered the lecture, I did not know him. I do of course know of him and of his great range of contributions to Australia, to this library, science and the arts in particular. I do have the good fortune to know two of his siblings, Baillieu Myer and Lady Marigold Southey, and to have seen something of the breadth of their contributions to the community. The fourth of that generation, Neilma Gantner, I know only by reputation. They all uphold the commitment to the public good which was a hallmark of Ken Myer's life.

There are many topics and issues which would benefit this lecture in Ken Myer's name. However, presumably he would especially approve of a topic about how we might advance the public good three decades after he left us. And I would like to think that he would see fairness as an essential element of the public good, especially for a people whose national ethos is "a fair go for all". After all, the "public good" should mean both the good of the public as a whole and the good of its constituent parts.

These are the best of times yet the worst of times, to borrow from Charles Dickens.

By some measures of economic development, Australia is doing very well – we have some beautiful sets of numbers, to quote a former Prime Minister. For those who benefit from this, it is the best of times. There is every reason why it could be the best of times for all.

Yet for many disadvantaged Australians the situation is acute, as revealed in some important social indicators I will refer to later. For them it is not the best of times – for some important groups it is, or is perceived to be, the worst of times. Many communities of Indigenous Australians are an obvious example.

There is a fault line which runs from each disadvantaged community or sector to the heart of our public institutions. These fault lines undermine belief in our institutions because they undermine belief in that national ethos of fairness.

I chose this topic, "Achieving a fairer Australia," because there is unease abroad among many Australians about where we are at after two decades of rapid change, and about what the future may hold. Many are concerned - yet there is little overt or focused pressure for change.

Perhaps that's because the majority are reasonably happy. Or perhaps it's because people don't know what feasible alternatives there are - especially when our social world is now so much more complex than it was just 20 years ago, let alone 50 years ago.

So tonight I want to put forward some thoughts on how we might think strategically about achieving fairness. Thinking strategically means taking a context as it is, imagining feasible alternatives which would make it better, and mapping out realistic courses of action which might connect the two. I say ***might*** because none of us can accurately predict the long-term consequences of our actions, and these days we're all only too well aware of the unintended consequences of human action.

My purpose is to demonstrate that:

- ~~///~~ firstly, now more than ever, we the citizens have a key role to play in achieving fairness, and in restoring to government the capacity to successfully deal with the fractures in our society; **but**
- ~~///~~ secondly, governments must assist if we are to do all that needs to be done; and
- ~~///~~ thirdly, there can be positive value in the interaction between public and private efforts – it produces better outcomes.

Summed up, the strategy recognizes that the private, the voluntary, the public sectors, all have roles to play and each works best in constructive partnerships which complement and reinforce each other. And the core of the strategy is a community-driven and community-led approach which puts community at the center - not government or other external organisations.

Returning for a moment to the man for whom this lecture is named, it is important to note that the tradition of public service did not begin, or die, with Ken Myer. The first Australian Myer, Sidney, founder of the retailing business, left behind him the Sidney Myer fund. The next generation, Ken Myer's generation, established the Myer Foundation which now engages the third and fourth generations. It is noted in Foundation's most recent reports that all living generations including the fourth are actively engaged in it and in carrying out its work.

Private philanthropy is currently being encouraged in Australia - some would say to make up for a less full-hearted contribution by governments. With respect to Ken Myer and his wider family I want to acknowledge what is an American-scale philanthropic commitment to the public good. The breadth and scale of that commitment needs to be encouraged and multiplied in Australia.

I congratulate the Myer generations for their adherence to an ideal of public service. It is of course, in that tradition of active citizenship which was noted so acutely by de Tocqueville 170 years ago in America. If the citizen sees something which needs fixing, she or he sets up a committee or joins a committee to fix it. Fixing problems isn't something you just leave to governments.

That is at the core of what I want to talk about. We can all pay lip service to the need for fairness and decency in our community but we have to care enough to actually do something about it. I have paid tribute to a man and a family who did and continue to do things rather than tut-tutting about the state of things after a good dinner. Later, I will describe what others have done in two particular places to address issues which are central to achieving fair outcomes for the disadvantaged in Australia. In each case governments have also played a key role. Not only that, these cases show that governments,

by engaging with the aspirations of those they are helping, can actually enhance the outcomes which government seeks.

Of course there will be many views on what is fair. As Social Security Minister I found that for some people any benefit they don't get is unfair to them. But my idea of fairness is not of "the everyone must be equal" variety. We are and should be free to make choices about our lives which impact on our position in society - and equality of outcomes cannot flow from that. It is **having** the ability to make those choices which, to me, means to me that you have a fair go. **Not** being able to choose means not having a fair go.

To be denied access to education by reason of birth or circumstance, to be denied a chance to participate in the real economy by having a job, to be discriminated against on the grounds of race or gender, all these affect an individual's opportunity to choose and consequently are unfair. To have no chance, because of your circumstances, to understand the possibility of loving relationships, that's unfair. To be reduced to the belief that the only way you can share in the good things that life offers is to steal, that's unfair. To be deprived of the opportunity to live a truly human life with choices - **that** is unfair in a country as fortunate and as well-endowed as Australia.

We would have a fair Australia if we could break down the patterns of entrenched disadvantage which leave too many people suffering those sorts of unfairness.

It is clear that can be done. But to do it requires the desire to do it in both governments and communities. And the desire has to be strong enough to actually do something.

The something I am suggesting is as clear as it is varied. What is done needs the efforts of those who are disadvantaged. If they don't want change it won't happen. They must engage. For that to happen they have to know that change is possible and both the community and government have a role in that. The community in which they live needs to be supportive. It must engage. And governments, which control so many of the factors, they too must engage.

The private, the voluntary, the public sectors, all have roles to play and each works best in constructive partnerships which complement and reinforce each other.

What is needed is a community-driven and community-led approach which puts community at the centre not government or the other external organisations.

There has to be a lot less acceptance of the unacceptable by the whole community, a lot less of leaving it just to governments. And we need less of the government as boss in these matters rather than as facilitator.

What then do we do, as concerned citizens?

Firstly, I'll tell what we should **not** do. We should not look for simplistic, sound-bite, single-shot solutions to what are entrenched social problems. In particular, the idea that governments could quick-fix every problem by waving a magic policy wand, or pumping in money. The latter may be necessary in some cases which I could name (eg, family violence in Indigenous communities will not be dealt with unless real resources are put into it) but is seldom if ever enough of itself.

The conservatism of our society and our politics is not surprising given the prosperity and the freedom Australia provides the majority of us. We are conscious that in world terms we have a good life. Standards of living are high, we are generally not oppressed by governments or our neighbours. But there is also a sense of having lost something: trust, fairness, egalitarianism, mateship, all or any of these things. For some reason we think we are going backwards. Well for all our prosperity in some ways we are. One of my most admired

fellow citizens, Professor Fiona Stanley, a child health researcher, put it this way<sup>1</sup>

*There have been dramatic social changes for families and communities over the last 30 years. Social, technological, workplace and economic changes appear to have had most benefit for the wealthier groups in societies, with increasingly adverse effects on the growing numbers and proportions of families and groups in relative and absolute poverty.*

Yet we are in a period when not only is there a lack of significant disagreement about fundamental economic policies (a good thing in my view) there seems no political groundswell for attention to the areas of discontent and concern.

There is no real disagreement at the political level about the need for fiscal responsibility. Living beyond your means as a nation is no more sustainable than doing so as a family or individual. Governments and Oppositions will go on accusing each other of fiscal irresponsibility but the reality is that Australian government is now under-pinned by a broad consensus that deficits can only be a temporary phenomenon and governments must spend overall no more than they raise.

Again there is no real dispute that in countries where there is a civic community and the rule of law applies, competition and openness in the

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley, F. 'A unique new way of working Towards a National Partnership for Developmental Health and Wellbeing' p30 – Australian Institute of Family Studies.

economy enriches the community and provides greater opportunities for employment and consumption. The Hawke Government largely put into place what the dries in the preceding Fraser Government had (largely) unsuccessfully argued for. The Hawke Government made the major contribution to an open Australian economy and the subsequent Howard Government embedded in the notion of fiscal responsibility. Outside the small minority parties these are "givens" in Australia today.

Yet there is unease about this consensus position. This is reflected in the use of the term "economic rationalist" as a pejorative by the disempowered and the obverse use of the term "do gooder" by those who see economic policy as the only concern and attempts to even the balance as inevitably doomed to fail. Both rational approaches to economics and the doing of good might be thought good things but each side is uncomfortable with the other.

The unease about "economic rationalism" is not in fact unease about those relatively common sense and now proven policy approaches adopted by Labor and the conservative parties alike. What is troubling to those with social concerns is the sense that they mean that the impact of economic openness and fiscal responsibility on individuals and communities ill-placed to cope with change, is of no account. What is troubling is the perception that the poor, who are always with us, are poor because of their moral failings and there is nothing to be done but to let the market operate.

It is also troubling that the success of the agreed economic policies leads some to believe that government is necessarily part of, if not the whole, problem rather than part of the solution. They perceive that the market will always find the answer and not just an answer which will suit the savvy.

These may be caricatures of attitudes but most public discussion is conducted in over-simplified terms and most expert discussions whether about philosophy, economics, mathematics, tax, sociology or whatever are opaque. We as a community deal in our simplifications and indeed caricatures. Our coinage is the simplified if not the over-simplified and the over-simplified views I have described exist and are potent.

This is not an area where early change of views can be expected. After all Australia is rightly proud of its recent economic strength. There is welcome (and I hope, correct) bi-partisan consensus that Labor's economic reforms of the eighties and the present Government's fiscal reforms of the nineties are the sources of our strength and we are not under threat of a return to economic Luddism as a result of adversarial Westminster-style party politics. It is hard to imagine a return to the post World War II Keynesian consensus with confidence in the capacity of governments to solve our social problems with grand new programs.

This is where we have gone off the rails. We have diagnosed what was wrong with the past but inadequately examine what is wrong with the new status quo, the new received wisdom. There is little acknowledgement that the new order enhances existing advantage and heightens both the reality and perception of disadvantage among those in deprived circumstances. Both fact and perception matters here as the perception that one is disadvantaged can be self-fulfilling.

I don't want to quote a lot of social statistics. Those relating to the most disadvantaged Australians - the Indigenous community - life expectancy, rates of imprisonment and employment, housing standards, domestic and sexual violence are repeated so often as to dull their meaning or produce a sense of fatalistic hopelessness. Less well known is the vast deficiency in service provision to remote communities in particular, the failure to provide what the rest of the community regards as its citizenship entitlements, what the present Federal Government calls Practical Reconciliation. The deficiency is so vast that there is no real intention on the part of any government to fix it. They will all say they do not have the money to do so which really means that services to that group of disadvantaged just don't rank with the service needs of more advantaged people with more electoral clout.

This is an issue that goes beyond Indigenous Australia. Indigenous Australians are just one subset of the disadvantaged and reference to them is just as an extreme example of a wider set of issues. To quote Professor Stanley<sup>2</sup> again:

*In spite of Australia's wealth and generally high level of education, many indicators of developmental health and wellbeing are showing adverse trends amongst children and adolescents.*

*There have been dramatic social changes for families and communities over the last 30 years. Social, technological, workplace and economic changes appear to have had most benefit for the wealthier groups in societies, with increasingly adverse effects on the growing numbers and proportions of families and groups in relative and absolute poverty.*

*The realization has dawned that the aetiological pathways to these increasing problems are extremely complex. Many paths appear to start in some aspect of social adversity and interact with a huge and changing variety of situations, factors and influences over the life span.*

*The response of governments, other agencies and the media to these current societal problems and rising rates tends to be far too simplistic, targeting solutions too close to the outcomes. Although often extremely expensive, these tend to be relatively ineffective, but demanded by the media and society which are apprehensive and poorly informed.*

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley, F. 'A unique new way of working Towards a National Partnership for Developmental Health and Wellbeing' p31– Australian Institute of Family Studies.

We know that the unfairness and imbalance in Australia lie at the heart of many of the problems we would like to see addressed –but our demands are, as Fiona observes, usually directed at solutions too close to the outcomes. The solutions may well require the removal of entrenched disadvantage rather than more and more complex programs attending to the unhappy results of that disadvantage. Try and get a political debate on that proposition!

It is disturbing that we have so little political debate about the impact of inequality on the problems which we want solved. There is research which supports what intuitively seems likely, namely that inequality matters. The Royal Australian College of Physicians has summarized research on the socio economic determinations of health and under the heading “Poverty and the Social Gradient” they report: <sup>3</sup>

*The gap between rich and poor has increased in Australia over the past two decades. Research suggests that countries with a more egalitarian distribution of income have better health outcomes, and that policies which aim to reduce health inequalities must first address inequities in income distribution.*

*People in lower socio-economic groups suffer disproportionately from ill health and have higher rates of illness and death. They are more likely to report their health and well-being as negative, to experience more*

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<sup>3</sup> Royal Australasian College of Physicians, ‘For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health...’ p10/12

*chronic illness and stress, and are more likely to have unhealthy behaviours such as inactivity, substance abuse and obesity.*

Then under the heading "Social Exclusion and Inclusion" they report:

*High levels of trust, feelings of belonging and community involvement are vital to the development of a positive and healthy society.*

*Societies with high levels of economic and social inequity have less cohesion, more violent crime and higher mortality rates. Social support from family and friends and the existence of mutual trust and respect in the community, have a protective health effect and assist people to recover from illness.*

*Certain groups within our society suffer disproportionately from social exclusion. These people include: the unemployed and work-injured; people living with mental illness; migrants and refugees; sole parents; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; the homeless; ex-prisoners; the chronically ill and older persons.*

This raises the question, do we need more programs to counteract substance abuse, ill-health, obesity and crime or do we need programs which reduce inequality?

We gao! people at a great rate in Australia not least in my State of Western Australia. Max Maller of the Crime Research Centre at the University of Western Australia provided me with the figures on the employment status of persons received into prison in that State in 2000.<sup>4</sup>

- a) the number of persons received into WA prisons during 2000 who had, or hadn't been employed prior to becoming imprisoned.

Prior employment	Male		Female		Total
	Aboriginal	Non	Aboriginal	Non	
No	1706	2190	426	375	4697
Yes	417	1189	38	61	1705
Total	2123	3379	464	436	6402
As a percent:					
Unemployed	80%	65%	92%	86%	73%
Employed	20%	35%	8%	14%	27%

- b) the number of persons in prison on the night of 31 December 2000 who had, or hadn't been employed prior to becoming imprisoned.

It is

Prior employment	Male		Female		Total
	Aboriginal	Non	Aboriginal	Non	
No	756	1232	101	114	2203
Yes	158	683	8	23	872
Total	914	1915	109	137	3075
As a percent:					
Unemployed	83%	64%	93%	83%	72%
Employed	17%	36%	7%	17%	28%

clear we excel at gaoling the unemployed – and we could add, the ill-educated.

This raises the question, do we need to build more prisons or to tackle unemployment and educate better?

<sup>4</sup> Maller, M. Principal Research Analyst, Crime Research Centre

From the evidence of State election campaigns there is much more interest in putting more people in gaol than in dealing with underlying social factors.

The notion of entrenched disadvantage lies at the heart of my concerns about fairness in Australia. There is no doubt that there are outsiders and insiders socially and economically. There is no doubt that within the community individuals will make myriad choices about life and lifestyles. That is what produces the wonderful mosaic of a free society. But for too many the choices are made for them by birth upbringing location or misfortune. Where those circumstances result in social or economic exclusion, where they lead to low self esteem, despair and anger we are all losers. We live in a lessened and more dangerous community.

It doesn't have to be like that. We are all coloured by our own life experience. In my case my formative years were as a child in a large family of a schoolteacher father. My parents inculcated in us that their gift to us was the opportunity for a good education. With that they led us to believe we could do what we chose with our lives. We knew they sacrificed for us and that made us take getting an education seriously. The capacity for lives to be transformed through the efforts of parents, teachers and community is part of my experience and influences my view on how to transcend disadvantage. The example of my wonderful parents' own lives set the ideal that any child, from any circumstance, ought to be able to do anything.

It is that creation of real opportunities for every life that is to me, social justice. Sir William Deane's last televised comments on Reconciliation before he retired as Governor-General emphasized both symbolic reconciliation and the possibility that every Aboriginal child at school would have the same opportunities as children from the broader community. I would add, when every disadvantaged child has the same opportunities as the advantaged I think we will have achieved a fairer Australia.

Is that sort of fair society possible or am I yet another sixty-year-old peering anxiously backwards to an irrevocably lost past in the 1950s? I don't think so. Fairness can be pursued with reasonable hopes for success. The trick is to produce the commitment to change in the relevant community, to ensure that the resources needed to back the commitment are available and to encourage the stamina of the participants to manage the factors influencing the outcomes until you actually achieve them.

My experience as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and subsequently Minister for Social Security, has provided me with plenty of examples of ineffective government interventions and unintended consequences of attempts to achieve greater fairness. My more recent experience, however, has been that there is no reason why interventions cannot be effective to remove the blockages to full participation in Australian life.

Gumala Mirnuwarni (GM) is an education project in the Pilbara in Western Australia. It grew out of the clear wish of Hamersley Iron (HI) to be able to offer skilled employment opportunities to the Aboriginal people of the Pilbara, which would only be possible if students could achieve Year 12 standard at school. The company had received a Reconciliation award in 1997 for its work in employment creation but realised that, under then present circumstances, the sort of work it could offer was limited. The future of work in the Pilbara it realised was in more highly skilled work which required a good educational base for undertaking skilled apprenticeships. That educational standard was not being achieved.

Hamersley Iron (HI) retained the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation (PFF) to develop an approach. (PFF is a small charitable foundation formed to assist young Aboriginal people to succeed.) A critical point is that both Hamersley Iron and the Polly Farmer Foundation believed that unless Aboriginal people wanted that outcome there was no point in pursuing it. Independent research commissioned by PFF and funded by HI showed that a significant group of Aboriginal parents in Karratha and Roebourne wanted good jobs for their children, that the children had the capacity to succeed, and that they wanted to have the prospect of good work. On that base collaboration was possible.

Gumala Mirnuwarni was brought into existence by bringing to the table all available stakeholders who might share an interest in that outcome: parents, school, State and Commonwealth Education Authorities, three resource companies - HI, Dampier Salt and Woodside Petroleum - each with a vested interest in positive engagement with the Aboriginal community as stakeholders and employees, as well as PFF with its remit from the great Aboriginal footballer, Graham (Polly) Farmer, to help young Aboriginal people to succeed.

This group determined they had a common purpose and set out to achieve it with extraordinary results in a few years. In the first five years, seven open matriculants have gone on to university. Fifteen have entered into traineeships and not one of the 70 participants has been in trouble with the law. School attendance figures for Aboriginal students are close to those of the general community students and, on teacher accounts, the whole atmosphere in the school has changed for the better. The outcomes are unprecedented and the former Commonwealth Minister for Education described GM as "the most successful Indigenous education model I have seen".

Yet, to borrow a phrase, what GM does is not rocket science. Rather it is about remembering what affects educational outcomes and addressing as many factors as possible.

 Home support wherever possible

 Ambition to succeed

- ~~SES~~ Commitment to that ambition
- ~~SES~~ The means to succeed – access to homework centres, and tutorial assistance as required
- ~~SES~~ Help when problems emerge
- ~~SES~~ Teacher belief in and commitment to the students
- ~~SES~~ A positive nurturing school environment
- ~~SES~~ The prospect of reaping great rewards from educational success.

Those of us who enjoy full participation in society, ourselves educated, ourselves benefiting intellectually and materially from our education, bring all those factors into play (often without thinking about it) when dealing with our own children. We need to think about it not just for our children but also for the legion of children in Australia for whom that is not their context or experience. They need those factors for success even more. GM shows that, however imperfectly, common action can deliver them.

The second example is an employment project in the town of Moree in the north-west of New South Wales. The Moree Aboriginal Employment Strategy (MAES) was originally driven by local non-Aboriginal determination to change a notoriously bad social situation. Again, for this audience, the problems at Moree probably don't need describing as we have had some sense of them from the Freedom Rides nearly forty years ago. The images of those rides created

Moree's place in the national imagination. It lived up to its place in folklore until, a few years ago, the local citizenry decided they had had enough.

Driven by a local cotton grower, Dick Estens (who is now a member of our Board at Reconciliation Australia), in collaboration with key Aboriginal leaders, this project has succeeded in dramatically increasing Aboriginal employment. At the same time it has also achieved an extraordinary shift in the town's self-perception and atmosphere. Moree is now a place that takes pride in its Reconciliation credentials as street banners, plaques and town signage profess. A project to use employment as the instrument of social transformation seems to have succeeded in a way that is unprecedented.

Reconciliation Australia commissioned an independent evaluation of this project, because it regarded what has been achieved in Moree as of national significance. ATSIC provided us with financial support to do that. The evaluation brings out complexities, not all of which I can elaborate on here. However, the direct verification of the transforming nature of the project came for me when I spent a day in Moree with the Employment Minister, Tony Abbott. We were escorted around the town by Lyall Munro, who was the NAC leader in my time as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs more than twenty years ago. His guided tour of Moree was in terms of describing a bleak past and a hugely-improved present. I can't think of a similar presentation over the last 20 years of numerous contacts with Aboriginal communities in rural towns.

The executive summary from the independent evaluation commissioned by Reconciliation Australia, brings out the features of this transforming project.

The evaluation records:

*The story of the Moree Aboriginal Employment Strategy (MAES) is a remarkable one of hope and encouragement. It demonstrates that with commitment, flair and persistence, significant progress can be made relatively quickly in both Aboriginal employment and in community relations more generally, in areas with a troubled tradition.*

It notes among many other features:

- ?? A long unhappy history of a community rent by disharmony and discord.
- ?? The exceptional champions who contributed to its success.
- ?? The 433 job placements in 4 1/2 years including 34 in traineeships and apprenticeships.
- ?? Entry into new work areas such as retail.
- ?? Changes in attitude by employers.
- ?? Greater interest by students in achieving better results.
- ?? Positive role models.

Neither of my examples has produced Nirvana. There are and always will be issues to be dealt with in Karratha, Moree - or indeed anywhere. But each has

produced a greater measure of fairness than hitherto applied. Just ask the university students and the workers in real jobs.

Each of these endeavours –real examples of real change - involve public/private partnerships, Indigenous/non-Indigenous partnerships, the capturing of Indigenous aspirations, and preparedness of stakeholders to manage towards an agreed objective. Those involved have accepted ownership of the project and the responsibility of managing it over the long haul to produce the desired results.

What each has achieved is a rate of progress beyond what I would have expected from observing programs in the past. Each is a clear magnification of what could have been expected from the unaided effort of any one of the stakeholders. The non-government people used their own resources but needed taxpayer support as well. We know from results elsewhere that the government programs accessed by each project would not have achieved the same results and spread of results without the community engagement or the non-government engagement in pursuing the objectives.

A fundamental reason why we need to engage the community and corporate sectors is that there is an interesting chemistry in the interaction between the public and the private sector. Put them together in pursuit of a common objective and each is put on its mettle to perform. Aboriginal people see their

aspirations, ideas and initiatives supported and made achievable. Private enterprise in such arrangements embraces a higher public purpose. Public servants see the need for practical and flexible program application to achieve agreed outcomes. It is an extraordinarily productive combination.

There is a further reason for private sector involvement: there are things the private sector can do that governments find difficult, in particular to be flexible and to meet needs as they occur. Socially transforming projects like these need to address problems as they occur. It is not the administrative guidelines which matter, it is the application of resources as required to achieve the objective.

It is a feature of modern government that we demand both accountability and efficiency. In itself that is good. But the processes used to those ends such as purchaser-provider models, strict guidelines, and particular program objectives also operate as straightjackets. Those straightjackets often mean that administrative attention becomes focussed on regulating and controlling processes rather than achieving the social objective.

It is pretty widely understood that there is a silo concept of program delivery. Governments define a program and it is administered within its own boundaries. What both GM and MAES demonstrate is that those boundaries often do not fit a rigidly-defined program boundary.

There is a much larger issue here about how governments can achieve social objectives through programs. We need to consider whether and to what extent programs are delivered in a way which is defined by governments rather than delivered in response to community demands.

Adherence to strict Employment Department programs in Moree would have diminished the likelihood of social transformation. Adherence to strict administrative arrangements relating to Aboriginal tutorial assistance rather than having guidelines designed to meet the operating circumstances of the program, might well have resulted in the continuation of almost no tutorial assistance being accessed as against the very large amount of assistance now being made available in Karratha.

I pose the question: could governments endorse particular community objectives and agree to provide resources in a flexible way to allow community/government partnerships to manage their way towards agreed objectives?

Communities, individuals and governments do not need to range too widely in the search for solutions to the imbalances in our society. The experience of the last thirty years permits realistic assessment of what works and what doesn't. The most positive way forward is the engagement of stakeholders in

genuine partnerships which require a commitment to an agreed objective or set of objectives, and a commitment of each stakeholder's resources to achieve those objectives.

The lesson is that we need fact-based, outcome-oriented, and managed approaches to achieving change. Communities have to be prepared to define their objectives, explain how they intend to reach their objectives, and be accountable for their activities and use of resources. Governments need to be there as partners in a common enterprise, committed to the purpose, and providing funds to **enable** communities to advance - rather than to those communities which can manoeuvre to fit the funding guidelines of national programs.

Most of what has to be done to achieve a fairer and more just Australia is not rocket science, it is simply hard work. It can't be done by individuals or families alone when there are adverse social circumstances. That's why governments remain vitally important. They need to work collaboratively with us in the community to achieve real change.

The way ahead is subtle but commonsense:

- ✍ It requires confidence in the role of governments - yet governments at times must follow and support rather than lead.

~~It~~ It requires active communities open to internal and external partnerships so that there is local ownership of solutions and local management of programs to achieve common objectives.

~~And~~ And it requires individual commitment - yet for the disadvantaged, that commitment will often come only when government and the local community make change seem achievable through their support.

We all have a role to play. If we wish to pay respect to Kenneth Myer's memory we will follow his example. To use an expression I picked up from some wonderful young Indigenous leaders: governments, communities and individuals can't just talk the talk, they must walk the walk.

## Footnotes

1. Stanley, F. 'A unique new way of working Towards a National Partnership for Developmental Health and Wellbeing' p30 – Australian Institute of Family Studies.

2. Stanley, F. 'A unique new way of working Towards a National Partnership for Developmental Health and Wellbeing' p31– Australian Institute of Family Studies.

3. Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 'For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health...' p10/12

4. Maller, M. Principal Research Analyst, Crime Research Centre