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SUBMISSION TO THE WELFARE SYSTEM TASKFORCE  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES, RESPONDING TO THE  
INTERIM REPORT OF THE REFERENCE GROUP ON WELFARE  
REFORM TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

# A NEW SYSTEM FOR BETTER EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

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## 1| LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- The principles of poverty alleviation and social equity should be articulated as pillars of reform. These are core values of a decent welfare system which must be founded on the principle that everyone in our community is adequately supported to live with dignity.
- In simplifying the pensions and allowances system, the Reference Group should specifically review the adequacy of the basic Newstart allowance, particularly in light of any plans to restrict the Disability Support Pension to people who are judged to be fully incapacitated.
- The proposal to extend income management must not be made without consideration of further evidence, including the many studies indicating that income management policies are failing to meet their objectives. Any expansion of such policies must be rigorously evidence-based, and clear in intent.

## 2| INTRODUCTION

UnitingJustice Australia welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on the Interim Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform to the Minister for Social Services. UnitingJustice is the justice and policy advocacy unit of the Assembly (national council) of the Uniting Church in Australia, responsible for addressing issues of economic, ecological and social justice and peace.

UnitingJustice works collaboratively with other agencies of the Assembly, with the Church's synods and congregations nationally, as well as with other civil society groups, to engage in advocacy and works that communicate the Church's vision for a reconciled world. This submission is grounded in the Assembly's vision that a faith lived in the world must work to end the structures that reproduce poverty and inequality, and that the Church's role must be to magnify the voice of those most vulnerable.

In its inaugural statement to the nation the Uniting Church in Australia affirmed its commitment to advocating for the vulnerable, declaring that "our response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs." It continued:

We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond. We affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate health care, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statement to the Nation, Statement of the inaugural assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, July 1977

In 2009 the Uniting Church Assembly renewed its commitment to the advocacy of social and economic policies which:

- support the growth of vibrant, safe and inclusive communities; and
- overcome poverty and injustice, addressing, as a first priority, the needs of people who are most vulnerable.

It called upon the Australian government to develop economic systems and structures that provide adequacy and alleviate poverty, recognising that:

human and ecological flourishing require much more than the creation of wealth by ensuring that public policy seeks to address, first and foremost, the wellbeing of all people... including providing adequate income support for those people who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged.<sup>2</sup>

It reaffirmed the principles supporting its 1998 statement on work and employment that “all people are entitled to just remuneration and equitable conditions of employment in their working lives, and dignity in unemployment”. Dignity is a quality that all humans possess innately, the expression of which is harmed by the imposition of oppressive circumstances. The Australian welfare system is the manifestation of our society’s concern that those most vulnerable among us have adequate resources that allow them able to live a life of dignity even in the absence of an ability to undertake paid work – whether for reasons of capacity or discrimination. These twin concepts then, of dignity and adequacy, inform the comments contained in this submission. They are the principles which should be the foundation of the tax and transfer system, which is a mechanism for ensuring that we are able to live in a way that ensures we flourish as a community.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Reference Group’s Interim Report, “A New System For Better Employment And Social Outcomes” (IR) but are concerned about the short time-frame for the preparation of responses (more time would have, for example, allowed us to provide more case studies from other states). We look forward to the final report and any further opportunities to participate in consultations on one of the most critical areas of policy for the future of our country.

### **3 | A CONVERSATION ABOUT WELFARE POLICY**

Bearing in mind the statements of the Church and the experiences of our networks, UnitingJustice Australia welcomes this review of the welfare system and supports the need for a structured, evidence-based re-evaluation of the tax and transfer system as a matter of good policy. We are alarmed by recent legislation introduced to the Parliament that would seek to alter policy settings on welfare piecemeal, and echo community concern about the effects of these changes which restrict young job seekers’ access to support payments, reduce payments and change indexations.

We note that the IR proposes a reimagining of the welfare support system around four values or “pillars of reform”:

- Simpler and sustainable income support system
- Strengthening individual and family capability
- Engaging with employers
- Building community capacity

These pillars seem to be uneven. While we support the first principle, the provision of a simpler and sustainable income support system, we would suggest that the other “pillars” do not constitute by themselves an adequate policy or moral framework within which to review the

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<sup>2</sup> An Economy of Life: Reimagining human progress for a flourishing world, Statement of the Uniting Church in Australia adopted by the 12th Assembly, July 2009 (09.21)

system. We are particularly disappointed to find that the basic goals of poverty alleviation and social equity are not articulated as key pillars underpinning a reformed system.

Rather, we note that there is a focus throughout the report on managing the costs and benefits of the welfare system in 'human capital' terms, and in terms of the cost to the state. Throughout, the report appears to conflate two separate concepts – the need for sustainable welfare reform, and a political imperative to reduce the cost burden of the system to the Government. The sustainability of economic processes must be measured by their social outcomes, and a focus on holistic social sustainability rather than simply economic cost reduction would be welcomed.

The IR states that the Reference Group supports reforms to the system that “are designed to maximise employment outcomes as a first priority”, citing health, financial, community and intergenerational benefits of work and employment, and noting that employment is “the best route out of poverty and disadvantage”.

While we would welcome a focus on the importance of dignified work, there seems to be an underlying assumption to these comments that the welfare base is a poverty level base; and that recommended reforms are not designed to address this in the first instance. The report's assertions that the poor health, social and community outcomes from long-term unemployment are evidence for the primacy of work as an outcome are difficult to digest, given that there is no discussion of causation. They imply that the Reference Group is fundamentally comfortable with the idea that welfare payments are properly set at a level that produces these outcomes, and is as such manifestly inadequate and undignified.

That our welfare system should be structurally and intentionally inadequate in its provision for vulnerable people, and that it should be articulated to produce outcomes that

reduce peoples' ability to live with dignity, is a disturbing assumption. The vision that emerges from these assumptions, of a fiscally sustainable social support system that is comfortable with entrenching its recipients in poverty as a way of motivating them to seek paid work is profoundly regressive social policy.

This is particularly the case given that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that at current economic and labour market conditions, there is a huge mismatch between the number of job seekers and the number of available jobs. At May 2014, ABS figures showed that there were five unemployed people for every vacancy<sup>3</sup>. While the IR moots policy settings to reduce red tape, provide job seekers with relocation allowances, and re-articulate job provider services around employer needs, there is little discussion of how to address this fundamental mismatch. The IR notes the effects of systemic deregulation of the labour market, in the rise of insecure part-time casual employment, but it does not connect this systemic job insecurity and underemployment at the bottom of the labour market to a discussion of welfare dependence. The report instead targets the majority of strategies toward reforming job seekers themselves, stating that achieving employment is the best way to alleviate hardship.

We would argue that any review of the welfare system's structures and policy underpinnings must be an opportunity to take into account the fact that, while fitting people and communities for dignified work is an utterly desirable outcome, it is dependent on economic factors beyond the individual's capacity to work. The imperative outcome is that as a society and a nation we ensure that every member of our community is protected from poverty, that families are supported to provide for their households' basic needs, and that our economic system is configured to ensure that people are provided with opportunity and choice. We see the tax and transfer system as one mechanism for this.

<sup>3</sup> ABS Cat 6202.0 and 6354.0, May 2014

#### 4 | THE CONCEPT OF ADEQUACY, AND THE BASIC PAYMENTS

The concept of adequacy, we believe, should be a fundamental consideration in any analysis of the existing welfare structures and any new proposals to restructure and simplify the system. We note that the IR states that income support has to be sufficient to provide a basic acceptable standard of living to those with no other means of financial support, and we support the notion that current allowance rates must be assessed against a range of measures, with particular reference to poverty alleviation.

The IR notes the high level of community concern about the adequacy of the Newstart payment and the disparity between this allowance and the pensions payments. We are concerned however that, given the large amount of evidence presented to previous inquiries around this subject, including the 2009 Harmer Review and the 2012 Senate Review of allowances, no recommendation has been made that this basic allowance be raised. The 2012 report of the Senate Employment, Education and Workplace Relations Committee found that the structure and amount of the Newstart allowance was inadequate, and indeed that its low rate and specific eligibility requirements posed a barrier to workforce attachment. The report made a series of technical recommendations, including that the Allowance be increased by specific amounts to ensure adequacy, and that the threshold for additional earnings be increased to reduce structural barriers to taking up short-term employment.<sup>4</sup> Given this thorough and recent review's findings, we are concerned that the IR has not made a specific recommendation that addresses the problems that previous reviews have identified.

Our primary concern is that there is clear evidence that basic needs are not being met and that for many, poverty on Newstart is an entrenched reality, even when combined with casual part-time work. UnitingCare Australia,

<sup>4</sup> The adequacy of the allowance payment system for job seekers and others, the appropriateness of the allowance payment system as a support into work, and the impact of the changing nature of the labour market Report of the Senate Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, November 2012

an agency of the Assembly, released a survey report in May 2013 outlining the hardships experienced by people accessing UnitingCare Emergency Relief and Financial Counselling services nationwide, the vast majority of whom were already receiving welfare payments. Of those surveyed

- 65% indicated that they could not afford adequate food, and
- 45% could not afford their energy bills, and
- in regional areas, these figures were higher. Nearly 90% could not afford food and 60% could not pay their electricity.<sup>5</sup>

This survey was conducted contemporaneously with changes to the welfare system that transitioned people from the higher Parenting Payment and onto the lower Newstart Allowance, and 37% of respondents were in this situation. The transition onto Newstart had profoundly affected their ability to adequately provide for themselves and their children, with one recipient made homeless by the change and others explicitly talking about new difficulties in meeting housing costs.

This is echoed by feedback we have received from people interviewed at Bidwill Uniting, which is a community development initiative based at Bidwill Uniting Church in the Mount Druitt area of Western Sydney<sup>6</sup>. We thank Bidwill residents for their willingness to comment on these personal matters. Bidwill is an area of high welfare dependence and a concentration of public housing, with 23% unemployment and 93% of its public housing residents receiving payments from Centrelink. Bidwill residents face multiple barriers to secure employment participation.

Beth (all names have been changed), a 40-year-old woman living in public housing told us that she receives Newstart allowance and has her rent, electricity and water paid from her fortnightly lump sum to ensure that she's never

<sup>5</sup> Financial Hardship in Australia: A survey of people seeking Emergency Relief and Financial Counselling across Australia, UnitingCare Australia, May 2013.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1

behind on rent and utilities. After housing and utilities have come out, she has \$170 per fortnight in her account. She told us that if she were to have her income boosted, the first thing she would buy would be more food:

My electricity is taken care of, my rent is taken care of, water's taken care of, it's just food and getting luxuries. Like you know, a nice shirt or just something... Not enough and fresh food. Yeah, for sure I've gone hungry. I've had to ring up for vouchers to St Vinnies.... The last one I received was two \$15 vouchers. It varies, sometimes I can go without a whole month of not getting a voucher, but other times I might get two or three... but I try not to, because with me I have this Miss Independent Girl attitude.

David, a 22 year old man receiving Newstart, is passionately interested in working as a motor mechanic and in pursuit of this dream he had relocated to Sydney, undertaken a TAFE Certificate 1 in this area in the past year, and sought trainee employment in this field for many months to allow him to complete Certificates 2-4. Despite a strong start he has been unable to obtain this further training and work due to his age; at 22, he is more expensive to employ than a junior trainee. Currently he lives with his grandmother, an aged pension recipient, because he is unable to afford basic living expenses on the Newstart rate. He has had difficulty finding full-time work in any field:

I'm taking other work for the time being, any job just to get me off the dole, but mechanics is what I want to get into...I've done tiling, in a removalist team, mowing, I was a farm hand for a couple of years... shearing. I would move [to look for work as a mechanic] if I had the money, but without money I can't go nowhere. I'm bound.

We ask that these stories be taken as illustrative of broader, quantitatively-based evidence (such as that cited above) suggesting that poverty and Newstart go hand-in-hand. Bidwill Uniting's work with the community to alleviate hardship and provide choice is an example of the

community development work undertaken by non-profits to build community capacity, and is detailed further in Appendix 1.

### **The Concept of Adequacy and Changes to the Disability Pension**

We note with concern the suggestion that people who are not wholly or permanently incapacitated should be moved off the Disability Support Pension, with the assumption that people who are only partially incapacitated, including those with episodic mental illnesses, should be able to work for income. There is also mention of the potential of the NDIS to "enable" carers of people with disabilities to undertake part-time work or work-ready activities, which would seem to affect their payment status.

Our concerns arise from both the disparity between the higher rate of the DSP and the far lower Newstart Allowance, currently around \$300 per fortnight; and the rationale for this move. The review has signalled that this gap should be reconsidered and reduced, based on the recipient's capacity to work. Again, this rationale assumes that the capacity to work is a quality of the job seeker, not linked to wider labour market settings affecting the availability and quality of work, or to issues of discrimination. While the IR notes that employer attitudes are a difficult barrier for people with disabilities, it does not explore this in relation to the impact of this policy proposal.

Evidence-based policy questions the Review should consider further include the ability of "partially incapacitated" people to seek or gain paid work, particularly in regional and tight labour markets and in light of the current national underemployment and unemployment rate of around 14%; the adequacy of Newstart to support a person with a disability while they look for work, particularly given the extra living and medical expenses often incurred by people with a disability; the practical and health implications of a person with an episodic disability living without regular and assured payments; and in an overarching sense, the suitability of having a systemic reliance on the

availability of seasonal or casual work, which is often unreliable and low-paid, to support people whose disability means that at some times they are not able to work.

## 5 | INCOME MANAGEMENT

The Uniting Church, both through its agencies and its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Congress (“Congress”) congregations and programs, is an active part of communities in APY lands and the Northern Territory where income management policies are currently in place. Within these communities there are differing views as to the value and efficacy of income management policies, particularly the concern of the compulsory nature of the policy. Some members of the community have positive attitudes toward income management, noting that in particular circumstances it may provide benefits.

It is our concern however that the IR seeks to broaden the operation of income management schemes without a rigorous, evidence-based assessment of the benefits of the scheme as currently in operation. One of our key concerns is that any broadening of this contentious scheme must be based on sound evidence that income management will achieve its goals and must be delivered only in consultation and dialogue with the affected communities. We would argue that the IR does not mention important and rigorous evidence that clearly demonstrates that the current scheme is fraught with problems.

### Existing Evidence

The IR uses exceptionally limited evidence to support its assertion that income management schemes have been successful and should be broadened. It refers to two Government-funded evaluations reports, “Evaluating New Income Management in the Northern Territory: First Evaluation Report 2012”, and “Cape York Welfare Reform Evaluation Report 2012”, as providing some positive policy evidence for the positive effects of income management.

A close examination of these evaluation reports, however, shows that their content has been at best selectively represented in the IR, and that in fact the first of these reports actually concludes that income management is not achieving its objectives.

The IR selectively represents evidence from the ongoing evaluation of the Northern Territory rollout of ‘New Income Management’. The comprehensive, Government-funded evaluation has produced an interim report, noting that although the evaluation continues in 2014, “the data collected to date allows some clear initial findings to be made”<sup>7</sup>.

These initial findings show that:

- changes in the community cannot be positively correlated to the introduction of income management, separate to the substantial additional resources expended during the same time period in these communities;
- evidence available shows that compulsory income management is a blanket measure that is applied to people who are actually able to manage money, and do not have problems with alcohol or gambling;
- in relation to people on voluntary income management, there is evidence that those who choose to be on the scheme value aspects of it, although there is evidence that confusion exists as to the voluntary nature of the scheme; and
- there are questions about the value and operation of Child Protection Income Management, with some child protection workers reluctant to refer families to this measure due to concerns about the appropriateness of the measure in cases where economic neglect is not a feature; and due to bureaucratic concerns, such as the need for a case to remain open while income management was in place.

The evaluation report concludes that while income management may assist some members of the community to cope with particular issues

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<sup>7</sup> Op cit, page xvii

they face, its blanket application is not based on evidence and has led to “widespread feelings of unfairness and disempowerment”, further stating:

There is little evidence to date that income management is resulting in widespread behaviour change, either with respect to building an ability to effectively manage money or in building ‘socially responsible behaviour’ beyond the direct impact of limiting the amount that can be spent on some items. **As such, the early indications are that income management operates more as a control or protective mechanism than as an intervention which increases capabilities.**<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added)

With relation to the “Cape York Welfare Reform Evaluation Report 2012”, the IR refers to positive perceptions of income management in promoting socially responsible behaviour and improving the wellbeing of communities and children. Again, reading the full report, it is evident that these perceptions cannot be separated from a broader program (“a suite of support services”) which is in operation in partnership with the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (CYIPL). This program is heavily tailored to the area and has been introduced with a high level of consultation and education. The report evaluation also states that income management was introduced after referral to and by the Families Responsibilities Commission (FRC), and not through Centrelink case management. The FRC is a unique body with links to the community not easily replicable through a local Centrelink or Job Network casework approach. The disparity between these outcomes shown in this report, and the outcomes reported from the Northern Territory scheme, and the unique nature of the CYIPL, raises significant questions about the ability of the Government and Department to replicate this program.

There also exists other research into the efficacy of these programs that has not been reviewed by the Reference Group. A key research centre at the University of Technology, Sydney—Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning—compiled an extensive assessment of the Government’s reports into the efficacy of various income management schemes. The conclusion reached by this report is that Government-funded studies “showed, at best, that some interviewees in affected groups reported that some things had improved, but the studies failed to validate these opinions with any independent data that confirmed their assertions.”<sup>9</sup> These concerns, along with others around methodology, the limited availability of quantitative data and reliance on qualitative assessments, and questions over the independence of some evaluations, were raised in a Parliamentary Briefing Note on the matter.<sup>10</sup>

We suggest that there would be some difficulty in justifying support for a broadening of income management policies as best practice, where there is no evidence that existing trials have been consistently effective in promoting their objectives or achieving their aims.

### Other Evaluations

The IR notes other current evaluations of income management schemes in the Northern Territory, the place-based sites, and on APY lands, which are not taken into account, because they have not yet reported. These appear as potentially significant reports which will need be taken into account. This may be particularly so in the case of the place-based schemes, some of which exist within major cities and as such operate in very different economic circumstances than those in the NT and remote regions. We note that Deloitte Access Economics have been commissioned to undertake a review of the place-based schemes asking significant high-level questions, focussing on the impact, administration and outcomes of the schemes, including differentiated

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, page xix

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.jumbunna.uts.edu.au/researchareas/journals/specialissue.html>

<sup>10</sup> *Is Income Management Working?* Department of Parliamentary Services, 2012

research into the Child Protection, Housing and Voluntary Income Management streams. It is troubling that the Reference Group would seek to recommend income management policies be broadened without waiting for reference to the evidence that these reports will offer.

### **Income Management For Youth**

We are concerned by the potential inclusion of income management as a way to “assist the large number of disadvantaged young people not fully engaged in either education or work”. It is unclear from the IR whether this measure would be taken universally or whether it is envisaged that it would be put in place as a sanction.

If it is the intention of the Reference Group to consider recommending that income management is broadened through a Centrelink case management approach in order to “increase capabilities”, it is important that the Reference Group take into account the evidence in its entirety. It is clear from the conclusions of the Northern Territory report for example that increasing capabilities is not a universal outcome of income management policies.

### **Case Management**

It is also unclear that Centrelink case management, or the case management of job network providers, would be in their current forms suitable vehicles for administering any such policy. In preparing this submission, we spoke with people who access Uniting Church programs in Bidwill. The people we spoke to were scathing of the efficacy of the local job network provider, with each of our interviewees stating that they had failed to find work through their provider, but rather had accessed it through other community networks or friends. Each stated that there was an unevenness in the provision of services by these providers. Samantha (name has been changed), aged 45, told a disturbing story about being “breached” for non-attendance at a scheduled check-in, despite the fact that she had been called in at the last minute to work a shift at her casual job:

I didn’t go to a job network interview and I was breached, even though I was at work. They had me going even though I was working 30 hours per fortnight, let alone the 70 hours I did over the week of the Easter Show...

I’ve been breached from the job agency, and Centrelink’s had no choice but to act on what they said. They’re the ones who report to Centrelink when you don’t turn up to interviews and things like that. They’re the ones that have that right to breach you. I went in [to Centrelink] the first time I got breached I said, you guys know, they’re the idiots who set up the job appointment. I go to a [work shift] appointment and miss an [agency] appointment and I’m in the wrong? and Centrelink overwrote them straight away.

We understand that the Jobs Network is currently under review and at the insistence of these interviewees we urge that evidence relating to the suitability of the for-profit Network to administer expanded case management including income management, be carefully considered.

## 6| CONCLUSION

UnitingJustice Australia, as the Church's national policy and advocacy unit, is not involved in the provision of services but rather the review of policy principles and advocacy for particular guiding paths. With this in mind, this submission has focussed broadly on the need for welfare reform that concentrates on poverty reduction and social equity, ensuring that each member of our community is supported adequately to live a life of dignity.

We advocate, in line with established best practice, that welfare reform should be evidence-based, with all available evidence being taken into account and rigorous community consultation be undertaken before introducing new policies or broadening existing policies. We have focussed our comments in this area specifically on the adequacy of the Newstart Allowance, and proposals to introduce income management more broadly. We have sought to bring to this process voices of people who are currently living in a welfare-dependent community, and whose lives are affected by the community development work undertaken by the Uniting Church at Bidwill in Western Sydney, one of the many community groups that the report notes have an important part in helping build community capacity.

## APPENDIX 1 -

### CASE STUDY: BIDWILL UNITING

Bidwill Uniting (BU) is a community development initiative based at Bidwill Uniting Church in the Mount Druitt area of Western Sydney. Bidwill is an area of high welfare dependence and a concentration of public housing, with 23% unemployment and 93% of its public housing residents receiving payments from Centrelink. Bidwill residents face multiple barriers to secure employment participation, including a lack of local job-providing infrastructure - in July 2014 the ABC reported that despite a \$3 million upgrade to facilities, the Bidwill shopping centre has been unable to find a supermarket tenant.<sup>11</sup>

Bidwill Uniting's team is small, comprising two staff members and a community development worker funded by the Department of Housing. The work is driven by the team's imperative to build loving and trusting relationships with Bidwill residents as a basis for assisting them to overcome social and personal barriers to fulfilling their potential, developing local networks of stakeholders to deliver an integrated community development program with and for the local community. The work is diverse and the initiatives change depending on staff capacity, and are aimed at building strength with and through community, including:

- A partnership with Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH) and a group of volunteers to run a Kids Club on Wednesday afternoons 4pm – 6pm.
- A partnership with Fusion to run a Young Drop in program in the church on Friday afternoons 3pm – 6pm.
- A TAFE jobs readiness and job securing program for male youths on Thursday 10am – 2pm.
- Broadening Horizons on Monday – Taking male youths into new environments in which they can live learn and grow in with

a goal of instilling a sense of permission within them to look upward, onward and beyond.

- Partnering with the Salvation Army and UNOH there is a Tuesday afternoons sports program aimed at 10-14 year olds.
- In partnership with UNOH, putting on a community breakfast on Tuesday mornings.

Joshua Bleyerveen, a staff member at BU, describes his work:

In partnership with UNOH we recently took some male youth out to the outback Compton downs for just under a week a time of escaping, new living, learning and growing. Hopefully in the future there will be room to do more camping type experiences like this. We have a documentary about another trip where four young men from the community 13-17 took a spiritual pilgrimage of a kind walking the Overland Track in Tasmania. This film is called "Beyond Bidwill".

I regularly go on a number of pastoral outings with young people primary school aged through to people in their early/mid twenties. Building a relationship of care and trust.

Once a month we also have a community gathering in the cottage where residents help share in conversation about what they would like to help to do in the community and we all share in a pot luck dinner together where each person brings a plate of food to share.

We try to leverage relational capital to help others coming into the community do positive things. At the beginning of the year we helped a group of organisers and artists put on FUNPARK, which ran for a few days in Bidwill as part of the Sydney festival.

We also help out more generally in small ways when someone from the community comes to us needing assistance with something.

<sup>11</sup> Philippa McDonald and Mohamed Taha, Bidwill residents describe life in a western Sydney suburb 'full of sad stories' 7/7/14 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-07/bidwill-a-suburb-in-crisis/5240962>

This could include: helping them on the phone, helping them doing things with Centrelink, giving them a listen ear, getting to a medical appointment, helping them access a place to find food security, directing them to other services, helping give them driving lessons, offering them a computer to use, helping to transfer household goods (i.e. a fridge or washing machine) etc.

BU's community development intern program provides volunteer employment and community development training. Currently this position is held by Chris, who helps organise activities for local young men and who is attempting to move from a disability pension to paid work. BU have also been in discussions through the Blacktown district of the Sydney Alliance about how they can collaborate to form a "WorkingStart" program for youth in the Blacktown region.

UnitingJustice visited Bidwill Uniting in preparing this submission and conducted interviews with participants at the Community Breakfast, and we are grateful to the people who have agreed to share their stories with the Committee. Interviewees were self-selecting, interviews were open-ended around a series of basic questions, and the stories told were very personal, the evidence anecdotal. The purpose of conducting these interviews was to provide a snapshot of the kind of work that Bidwill Uniting does and the people it works with, and to allow their voices to be heard in this process.