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SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL INCLUSION INITIATIVE:
RESULTS-DRIVEN SOCIAL INNOVATION

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SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL INCLUSION INITIATIVE: RESULTS-DRIVEN SOCIAL INNOVATION

Monsignor David Cappo AO*

I want to talk to you today about two things. I want to talk to you about why the Social Inclusion Initiative has been a successful innovation for the South Australian community. I also want to talk to you about how the unique structure of the Social Inclusion Initiative has created its own culture of innovation in social policy in South Australia.

South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative is focused on building a more cohesive and inclusive community through results driven social innovation. In establishing the Social Inclusion Initiative, Premier Mike Rann wanted it to provide him with high-quality policy advice that his government could implement easily, that would address the complexity of highly resistant social concerns, and produce real and rapid change in the lives of disadvantaged South Australians.

In order to do this, the Social Inclusion Board has had to be incredibly innovative in the way it produces its advice to government. As such, South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative has been a prolific source of social policy innovation since its inception in 2002. Putting in place a semi-independent body such as the Social Inclusion Board to inform government policy at the highest levels is in itself an incredibly innovative and unique thing for a government to do. This innovation in social policy development has in and of itself created a special culture of innovation, the threads of which can be seen throughout social inclusion policy in South Australia.

Geoff Mulgan has described innovation as occurring at the intersection of systems. Where systems butt up against each other, innovative approaches sometimes emerge that allow quite separate systems to interact with each other. Unfortunately, innovation in this area is rarely organic. It is highly unusual, at least in Westminster governments, for systems to naturally start working together. It takes an external force or catalyst to bring systems together.

The Social Inclusion Initiative is the innovation catalyst in social policy in South Australia. It is situated at the centre of government policy making, which also situates it at the centre of intersections between government departments and their systems. The Social Inclusion Board's semi-independence and its position at the centre of government allows it to examine these intersections without being beholden to departmental cultures or traditional ways of working. This is what gives the Social Inclusion Board the ability to achieve breakthrough insights, insights that allow us to better understand the root causes of social problems and to determine how systems need to change to solve them.

This combination of semi-independence and a position at the centre of government policy making has created an environment ripe for innovation. This has been critical for the Social Inclusion Board to achieve real change through results driven innovation, innovation that has produced significant changes in the lives of a wide variety of disadvantaged groups in South Australia. Thousands of South Australians who have been homeless, who have been at risk of leaving school early, who have been heavily involved in youth

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offending, who suffer mental illness, have and will continue to benefit from the new ways of working brought about through the breakthrough insights of the social inclusion approach.

The Social Inclusion Board develops and implements its advice to government using a unique methodology that enables it to make operational our breakthrough insights and change systems. In describing the social inclusion approach, I would like to focus on some key words and concepts. These words are participation; opportunity; improving capabilities and functioning. Participation in the community at a level that gives us economic and social well being is at the heart of the drive for a socially inclusive society.

And how do we bring this about? By creating more opportunities for people, particularly the most disadvantaged: those people and groups who live on the edge of our community. And to engage people with increased opportunity requires that we intervene to assist people to enhance their capabilities in order that their level of functioning is such that participation can become a reality. Together with increasing capabilities and function, access to a wide range of relevant, effective and flexible services, supports, education, skill development and employment is of great importance.

An important strategy that is synonymous with the social inclusion approach is called joined-up government. This strategy was put firmly at the centre of public policy by UK prime minister Tony Blair in the UK Social Exclusion Program. Our Thinker in Residence, Dr Geoff Mulgan, as Head of Policy at Number Ten Downing Street and Director of the Strategy Unit, was at the centre of implementing this idea of influencing how structures are organised, how budgets are allocated, how targets are set and the day-to-day work of agencies and professions.

Joined-up government cuts across and through the self-contained units of government. Joined-up operations put together a wide range of services that match and respond to the causes of social problems. For example, homelessness is more than a responsibility of the housing department. An understanding of the profile of the homeless population will show that family breakdown; sexual and physical abuse; lack of skills; lack of employment; mental health; and drug, alcohol, justice and police issues, are all major areas of concern in homelessness. We identified these issues by listening to people who are homeless and we heard and understood their needs. So to achieve results, our policy and program of attack on homelessness joined up these areas in the one plan and the one overall budget. Joined-up services are the only way to properly address pressing social problems.

There are other important aspects of social inclusion methodology that need to be considered. These have been highly developed in South Australia in our social inclusion approach. The authority of the head of government, be it premier or prime minister (and deputy prime minister) is crucial. Joined-up government means crossing the territory of various government ministers. An individual minister cannot do this in the Westminster system that we operate under. The authority of the prime minister or premier is critical.

As well, the head of government's authority needs to be extended to a body, such as the Social Inclusion Board and the Social Inclusion Unit in South Australia, which acts with independence and provides independent advice, while embedded in government. This unique structure is then the mechanism necessary to cut across the various systems of government and bring about joined-up services to meet the needs, the multi-dimensional needs, of disadvantaged people as we enhance their capabilities and provide services and opportunities for participation.

As I mentioned earlier, a dynamic part of the social inclusion approach is an imperative to bring about change as quickly as possible. Ensuring that clear, observable, easily understood and articulated targets within a timeframe are attached to each area that social inclusion addresses is vital. This latter aspect of social inclusion is very important in our era. And it is very pertinent to the intractability of our social issues; which I mentioned earlier as highly resistant social concerns. The Social Inclusion Initiative has had six

years to develop in South Australia and our methodology has continued to evolve over this time. We are achieving significant results and we will continue to do so.

The success of South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative has led the commonwealth government to implement a social inclusion approach at the national level, in the form of the Australian Social Inclusion Board, of which I am Deputy Chair. Tasmania is also replicating the structures that we have put in place in South Australia and other states are closely examining our social inclusion approach.

It is not only the adoption of the structures that we have used that we find encouraging. There has also been significant replication of our approaches to homelessness and other areas that have begun to occur across Australia. The national adoption of the social inclusion approach is evidence of how effective it is in finding new and highly successful ways to address social issues.

The Australian Social Inclusion Board provides the commonwealth government and indeed the Australian community with another important lever to use in attacking social concerns to produce good results in shorter time frames than before. Central to the success of South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative is its ability to collect accurate data, analyse evidence-based research, search throughout Australia and indeed throughout the international community for innovations and strategies that work! We constantly have our radar on to ensure we recognise, embrace and promote innovation at every opportunity. This is absolutely critical and the Social Inclusion Board puts significant effort into fostering innovation in social policy in South Australia.

To seek out innovation, the Social Inclusion Board has engaged with a variety of international experts in its work. Geoff Mulgan has provided it with significant insights into improved policy implementation, especially the implementation of innovation. We engaged Rosanne Haggerty as a Thinker in Residence to inform our work on homelessness. Lloyd Sederer has advised us on mental health reform based on his experience in New York State and Carol Schapiro and David Kennedy have given us crucial insights into how to address the issue of repeat youth offending.

Engaging with experts such as these gives the Social Inclusion Board insight into strategies that produce real results. Proven programs that can be implemented to re-engage, and indeed engage for the first time, many disadvantaged Australians in a community of diverse individuals and families in which we aspire to live in dignity and in harmony with one another. All this means that in South Australia, and I hope in the national social inclusion framework, that we have an assertive if not at times aggressive approach to addressing social issues that the government refers to social inclusion for action.

We objectively examine the explanations given to us by government departments for the causes of problems. We seek their data as well as additional data from different sources and we analyse them ourselves, independently. We use both government and out of government resources to support us in our work and we produce new policy and intervention plans that are joined-up, and that include the non-government community sector and at times the business sector. The Social Inclusion approach always seeks a good balance between working with departments and existing mechanisms and resources, and at the same time avoids being captured by existing ways of working and traditional mindsets that can hamper efforts to work differently.

Sometimes social inclusion programs require new investment by government. But the new investment sought is always minimal, because we know that government resources are finite. Most often this means we need to shift existing resources, instead of asking the government for new or additional resources, because we know that most often they just aren't available. In fact, we aim to ensure that new funding for social inclusion programs results in reduced spending in the immediate system or in other related systems through reduced demand for services over time.

The government's investment in the new Common Ground housing developments for homeless people and people on low incomes is an excellent example of this. By housing people in stable accommodation and supporting them, they are much less likely to repeatedly present at hospital emergency departments, be caught up in the criminal justice system or require ongoing support from assertive outreach homeless services. All of this represents significant improvement in these people's lives. It also means much less demand on these services by this group, which reduces the cost to the government.

As I have said, we are an independent body embedded in government, working with the authority of the head of government. We communicate directly with the head of government and we provide Premier Mike Rann with policy and programs that he can use. We are his very unique and valuable resource. When we move in unconventional ways throughout the system of government and the public sector, we do it in order to provide him with the best advice and with plans for action; action that will work! The Social Inclusion Board is like the conductor of an orchestra. Its role is to get the right parts played, with the right instruments, in the right way, at the right time.

When our plan and costing is approved by Cabinet and given to the various departments to implement, the work of social inclusion is far from finished. Key roles of social inclusion are then to monitor the implementation of the program and evaluate its performance. All this requires strategic interventions from time to time to solve additional problems, remove obstacles, deal with resistance, encourage and support key implementation leaders, and use the authority of the head of government to keep programs to timeframes. As I have stated, this requires social inclusion to be the paramount body providing independent advice to government while embedded within the systems of government. So, social inclusion in South Australia is both an approach to social disadvantage and a unique method to bring about joined-up strategies to produce good results in as short a timeframe as possible.

These good results are obvious in our attack on rough sleeper homelessness. Between 2001 and 2006 the number of Australians sleeping rough increased by 19% across the country. Some states recorded increases of more than 30% during this period. In South Australia, the total number of people sleeping rough fell by 5% during this time. In fact, our most recent street count shows that in inner city Adelaide we have achieved a 30% decrease in the number of people sleeping rough since 2001. These results have been achieved through putting in place innovative programs like Street to Home and Common Ground.

Common Ground provides affordable long-term housing to people who sleep rough. It also provides accommodation to people on very low incomes who are not homeless. The model incorporates on-site support services for Common Ground tenants, which are provided in partnership by government, the not-for-profit sector and community volunteers. The successful implementation of Common Ground Adelaide has led to the adoption of the model across Australia, with Therese Rein taking on the role of patron.

The Street to Home service implemented by the Social Inclusion Board provides essential assertive outreach capacity to engage the most chronic rough sleepers. This service has contributed heavily to successfully housing the longest-term rough sleepers, some of whom had been homeless for up to 15 years. Street to Home is the crucial ingredient in our attack on homelessness, which allows other programs such as Common Ground to operate so successfully.

The Social Inclusion Board has also been successful in increasing South Australia's school retention rate to its highest level in over a decade. This is due in large part to the creation and implementation of one of the most successful education re-engagement programs ever put in place in Australia. The Social Inclusion Board's award winning Innovative Community Action Networks, or ICANs as they are known, have been one of the Social Inclusion Board's most significant innovations. The ICANs have provided individualised responses for over 6,000 young people across South Australia, successfully engaging or re-engaging over 80% of participants in learning and earning pathways.

There are many other examples of social inclusion innovations that have been implemented in South Australia across a range of systems from mental health to juvenile justice to Aboriginal health. South Australia's Social Inclusion Initiative thrives on doing things differently to produce real and rapid change in the lives of disadvantaged people in our community. Doing things differently relies on a culture of innovation and, as I have outlined for you, we are uniquely placed within government structures to drive the implementation of social policy innovation in South Australia.

Premier Mike Rann has now requested advice from the Social Inclusion Board on how to reduce economic disadvantage through improving the employment outcomes of disadvantaged South Australians. Achieving this will require us to use all of our power of innovation. Great new innovations will be required across numerous systems to achieve significant results and to achieve them quickly, but we know we will achieve positive change.

South Australia has not been in a position to achieve change of this kind for well over 100 years. We must seize the unprecedented opportunities that exist for us through tight labour markets and through the vast expansion of the mining, defence and advanced manufacturing sectors in South Australia. The jobs growth in these sectors combined with the impact of an ageing population are creating holes in our employment market; holes that need to be filled.

All Australian governments, federal and state alike, should be putting all of their effort into seizing this generational opportunity to increase the participation of disadvantaged groups and communities in meaningful employment in decent jobs. This is the key to building a more inclusive and cohesive society.

The challenge for us is great, but if we get it right, the benefits for our society and for future generations to come will be enormous. Innovation is the keystone to addressing complex and entrenched social problems. We must do all we can to foster innovation in South Australia by creating an environment that not only accepts new ideas and new ways of working, but that actually creates them. South Australia has been a leader in the area of social policy before and I know that we are now moving towards again being the hub of social innovation in Australia.