Professor Ross Homel:

I think social inclusion is a very useful concept in its own right because it includes the concept of poverty, it goes just poverty, poverty has the disadvantage that it tends to denote Charles Dickens, pictures of children in rags and focuses too much on the economic dimension, even though that’s fundamental social inclusion is also about participation, the capacity to participate in the larger society. It’s also about the wellbeing of individuals and families not just their economic wellbeing, but their social, emotional and cognitive development, more broadly understood. So at the end of the day we can’t afford not to have a focus on social inclusion in Queensland and it’s the best economic investment we can make.

Queensland needs to invest more in an early intervention and primary prevention system if it cares about its own future. There’s an overwhelming body of scientific evidence internationally that getting in early working upstream is far more cost effective than, it’s more humane and it’s actually better in the long run for the whole community. We can do better and we know how to do better. There are many proven examples now of programs that involve family support and involve strengthening the links between families and schools, that involves direct support for families. Holistic support for families and for communities in special need, particularly for those living in poverty or in areas where they are very very socially and physically isolated. This is fundamentally important if we care about the future of Queensland, and if we care about the hip pocket in time of crisis and potential austerity, we should be ensuring that the money we spend doesn’t all go into that crisis care. That is important in its own right, but we can get ten tines the value doing long term constructive work, with children, families, young people in communities in communities and schools before these problems emerge, or before they become entrenched.

It’s a lack of resources, but it’s also a lack of integration. It’s the lack of a commitment to a holistic approach. It’s actually seeing the outcomes for children in the broad context of the child’s family, its community, its school, its ethnic links and all of the other aspects of what I call the developmental system that shapes the kind of children and people that we are producing in our society. It’s not just a matter of inter-agency, it’s just a matter of getting all the services working effective together, although that’s hard enough, it’s about making the focus on the wellbeing of the children, the family or the young person over time and assembling all the resources that are needed to make that happen.