

Red

ISSUE 02 OCTOBER 2008



Social Inclusion

What would a truly inclusive society look like?

Wellness and an ailing health system

America's dotcom election

Adult stem cell discoveries

China beyond the mining boom

VC

Griffith University
Vice Chancellor and President

PROFESSOR IAN O'CONNOR



Striving for social inclusion

Social inclusion has come to the forefront of national attention with our Education

Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard recently launching a new Australian Social Inclusion Board with the observation: "Every Australian should have an opportunity to be a full participant in the life of the nation. Unfortunately too many Australians remain locked out of the benefits of work, education, community engagement and access to basic services".

Higher education plays a major role in this arena—not only through research uncovering the causes and effects of disadvantage and how it plays on sectors of the community, but also through developing programs and solutions that banish social exclusion.

Our recent submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education focuses heavily on social inclusion and the need to reduce disparities in the participation of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, indigenous Australians and people from rural and isolated areas. We believe that universities must play a strong role in developing students' civic responsibility, engagement and contribution; contribute to their region's civic, social and economic life; build social cohesion through mutual understanding and contribute to environmental sustainability.

How do we tailor and deliver education to make it relevant and life-enhancing to all sectors of the community? How do we open pathways some may have considered blocked?

Griffith University is already making solid inroads with programs like the Pathways to Prevention project developed in partnership with the Queensland Government and Mission Australia. This early intervention program in one of the most disadvantaged urban areas in Queensland focuses on children's transition to school. It integrates family support with preschool and school-based programs in seven Inala state schools within a community development framework.

I hope you enjoy reading our lead feature article in this edition of *Red* investigating this Pathways project and the broader issue of social inclusion. We also explore the nexus between indigenous culture and equity in learning; how Australia's healthcare system is facing up to a rapidly aging population; the ascendancy of cyber marketing in the current USA presidential elections—and other topics where higher education can play a vital role in solving the world's most pressing problems.



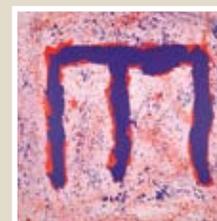
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The Griffith University Art Collection

Griffith Artworks (GAW) is a small organisation that provides cultural asset management, curatorial and research publication services at Dell Gallery, Queensland College of Art, and across the five campus zones of Griffith University. GAW is the management authority for over 3500 objects in the Griffith University Art Collection and administers the On-Campus Exhibition Program (OCEP) that displays the collection in thematic and curated groups on over 120 approved sites between the Gold Coast and South Bank, Brisbane. Almost 20 per cent of the collection is on display at any given time, one of the highest rates of exposure for any public collection of art in Australia.

In the past two years some very significant gifts have entered the collection, with a value in excess of one million dollars. The Paul Eliadis Gift featured over 70 works by Australian artists, including a rare set of 1960s linocuts by Ian Burn, a set of 1970s studies by Howard Arkley, and works by significant local artists Scott Redford, Luke Roberts and Eugene Carchesio. A large 1998 painting titled 'Possum', a key work from the first generation of 'New Expression' works by revered Warlpiri artist Michael Nelson Jagamara was also gifted by Dr Eliadis.



BACK COVER

Michael Nelson Jagamara
Possum
1998 acrylic on canvas

Gift of Dr Paul Eliadis via the Commonwealth Government's Cultural Gifts Program.

Copyright courtesy
Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane.



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This environmentally friendly process saves water and reduces toxins released into the air and entering our waterways.

Snapshots



Insects key to super-materials

Researchers have gone back to nature to search for new materials that self-clean and actively repel or attract water. University Scanning Probe Microscopy Facility researchers used advanced atomic force microscopy to observe and measure nano-sized structures on the wings of common insects. They then took imprints of the hydrophilic and hydrophobic wing structures and duplicated them on polymers to create materials with the same properties as the wing. Team leader Dr Greg Watson said while insect wings appeared smooth, they featured a landscape of specialised structures, the depth, proximity, size and shape of which determined their properties.

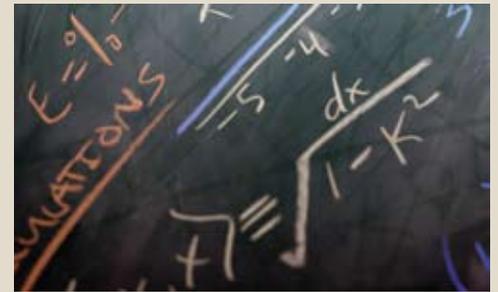
Singing helps spirits soar

An international study of more than 1000 singers in Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom has revealed that the majority of people who sing in choirs enjoy above average levels of psychological health and wellbeing. Professor Don Stewart, head of Griffith University's School of Public Health, said some of the benefits of choral singing were likely to be related to the social support and mental stimulation offered by a regular commitment to rehearsals and performances. He said singing also involves deep, controlled breathing and focused concentration which counteracts anxiety and blocks preoccupation with sources of worry.



Virtual fear

Stage fright may be a thing of the past as virtual reality technology helps prepare young performers for their careers on stage. Griffith University psychologist Dr Trevor Hine has found that computer-generated audiences, complete with real-world distractions such as fidgeting and coughing, provide wonderful training for nervous Conservatorium of Music students. The virtual audience created a lifelike environment for the students to exhibit the typical emotional reactions associated with performance anxiety. However, unlike in the real world, the virtual audience can be gradually manipulated, giving students time to learn to control their fears.



Numbers don't add up for gen Y

New research by Griffith University has revealed how technology is reshaping the way mathematics is used in the workplace. Professor Robyn Zevenbergen from the Institute of Educational Research said a study of 20 people under the age of 28 revealed school-learnt maths was little used or unused in their jobs. "The participants, who worked in occupations such as construction, hairdressing and auto-mechanics, use computers for tasks that would have once required them to use manual calculations," Professor Zevenbergen said. The study revealed a significant difference between the numeracy understandings and application of generation Y compared to baby boomers and generation X.



Blowing the whistle

Creating a governance system where the whistle can be blown on any wrongdoing in the public sector is the aim of a national, three-year collaborative project, led by Griffith Law School Research Fellow Dr A.J. Brown. The first report from the study, launched by Senator John Faulkner in early September, coincided with the first public consultation for the Commonwealth parliamentary inquiry into new "best practice" whistle-blowing legislation. Dr Brown said a coherent, national approach to the revision of whistle-blower laws was required. The *Whistling While They Work* project was jointly funded by the Australian Research Council, five participating universities and 14 industry partners.

www.griffith.edu.au/whistleblowing

Beijing Time

A quirky and slightly offbeat view of Beijing is offered in a new book by Griffith Asia Institute Research Chair Professor Michael Dutton. *Beijing Time* explores some of the lesser known secrets of Beijing. Described as the “thinking person’s guide to the city” it tells of the 4am raising of the flag in Tiananmen Square, explains the beating of the drums heard throughout the day, and discusses the feng shui of the city, which was changed when the communists came to power. It also takes a look at the many contradictions in the city; the old and the new, and gives an insight into the city different from that explored in travel books.



Businesses create sustainable consumers

As consumers increasingly look for “green” products and change their behaviour to be more sustainable, the focus on the individual is now shifting onto business. Griffith Business School branding and sustainability marketing expert Dr Dale Miller says there is a trend beginning where businesses need to make it easier for their customers to be “green”. One example is fashion houses which now offer customers the opportunity to return their old clothes to have the fabric recycled, in return for an incentive or discount. “Fashion is one industry with huge potential, but there are opportunities for similar programs across all industries,” said Dr Miller, who is beginning to work with Australian businesses to help them on this path to a greener, sustainable future.

Surfing the sustainability wave

Helping island nations maximise the social, economic and environmental outcomes of surf tourism is the aim of Griffith Business School researcher and Senior Lecturer Dr Danny O’Brien. Dr O’Brien has been working with a surf resort in the Samoan village of Salani to understand how surf tourism can deliver sustainable benefits. In some island nations poorly planned surf tourism has provided little benefit to host communities as the new breed of cash-rich, time-poor surfer spends big money on overseas-owned surf charters and very little onshore. For small reef-fringed island nations, properly managed surf tourism holds promise as a lever for the sustainable development of communities, plus infrastructure that can be used more broadly across the economy. Currently Samoa’s highest source of inward revenue is from expatriate Samoans sending money home to family members. Sustainably managed surf tourism can help change that.



Something to smile about

Indigenous communities who suffer from geographic and socioeconomic disadvantage, limited access to health care, and multiple health risk factors will benefit from an agreement between Griffith University and global consumer products company Colgate-Palmolive. Colgate will fund a senior academic position at Griffith to drive innovative research, education and community service in rural, remote and indigenous oral health. Dean of Dentistry and Oral Health Professor Newell Johnson said the agreement provided a fantastic opportunity to help advance oral health outcomes in these needy areas. “This agreement improves our capacity to build synergies between oral and general health promotion, research the common risk factors in indigenous communities, and expose oral health professionals to the challenges and rewards of working in these communities,” Professor Johnson said.



Worms clean up waste

A Griffith University researcher is recruiting earthworms as the latest weapon to resolve waste problems, fight soil contamination and restore fertility without the use of agrochemicals. Dr Rajiv Sinha is working to encourage governments, policy makers and landowners to adopt vermiculture on a commercial scale following the success of trials in India. “It has potential to reduce emissions of methane and nitrous oxides from landfills which are several times worse than CO₂ as greenhouse gases,” Dr Sinha said. In two studies, published this year in the UK journal *The Environmentalist*, Dr Sinha also reported that worms are effective in sewage treatment, reducing biological oxygen demand loads by 90 per cent and solids by 90–95 per cent without sludge formation, a biohazard produced in conventional sewage treatment. A second study supported the efficiency of worms in removing heavy metals, pesticides and organic micropollutants from soil, a technique known as Vermiremediation. “This has significance in Australia as large tracts of arable land are being chemically contaminated from mining activities, heavy use of agrochemicals and landfill disposal of toxic substances,” Dr Sinha said.

Regional cinemas in the spotlight

An innovative Australian Research Council project is exploring Australian regional and rural cinema exhibition. Professor Albert Moran from the School of Arts at Griffith University said the geography of media was significant in shaping how people interacted with each other: "Yet there has been little systematic effort in exploring these relationships as they relate to exhibition in regional and rural Australia." The research team will study 16 cinemas throughout Australia, assisting government, the film industry, arts and business organisations formulate better policies and programs to assist in improving quality of life for Australians living in regional and rural areas.



Braided Channels

Griffith Film School's Trish FitzSimons's creative research project *Braided Channels*, focuses on the women, land and history of Queensland's Channel Country. Spanning different mediums and forms, FitzSimons's work questions the "voice" of documentary: how her author's voice balances with that of her subjects, broadcasters, audiences and differing forms of documentary. In her Doctorate of Creative Arts which forms part of this project, Trish developed a vocabulary for herself and other practitioners to frame their practice, allowing the formation of appropriate social relations around their projects, including those which, like her own, have many indigenous participants. One element is the notion of "choric" voice, where the function of the chorus in classical Greek drama compares to how contemporary documentaries involve their audiences to move beyond passive reception of films.

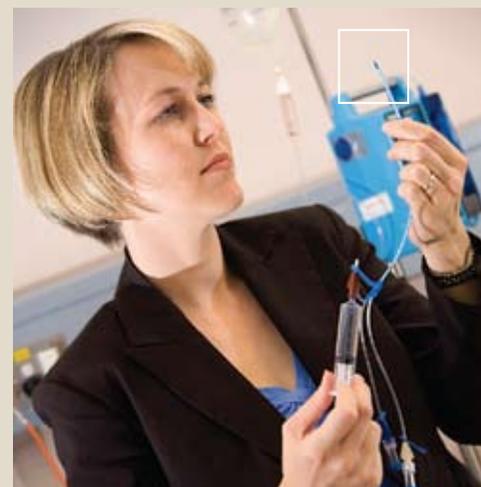
Blood, bugs and biofilm

Griffith University's Professor Claire Rickard, pictured right, has won a national Innovation in Nursing award for her research into the prevention of unnecessary blood loss in hospital patients. Professor Rickard's research focuses on improving management of medical devices such as the drips and catheters used to deliver potentially life-saving blood products, fluids or medications. While they are a cornerstone of modern medicine, the devices also carry significant risks of contributing to bloodstream infections. She is particularly interested in the role of bacterial biofilms, complex communities of bacteria that adhere to surfaces such as medical devices and increase resistance to antibiotics.



Artificial "brain" to boost bridge safety

The safety of 10,000 Queensland bridges will be improved through a world-first project using sophisticated artificial intelligence techniques to predict long-term performance of individual bridges and bridge networks. The Australian Research Council funded project between Griffith University, the Queensland Government and Gold Coast City Council has developed a system comprising an "electronic brain"—called an artificial neural network—able to learn from historical performance of the bridge, then make predictions about potential future problems. It can even reconstruct the past by generating missing historical performance data on older bridges to predict what could happen in the future. National statistics indicate the bridge maintenance expenditure in 2004–05 jumped to \$521 million, up 27 per cent on the previous year.



Valuing water in the Top End

A \$1 million research project to identify ways for communities to engage in planning for rivers and groundwater across northern Australia is underway. The National Water Initiative requires decisions about water needs to be made with community input. This means governments are expected to provide public access to information and need to be transparent in the decision-making process for trade-offs between different values and interests. Graziers, irrigators, resource managers, scientists, indigenous communities and catchment managers are involved in the project in a bid to improve planning for sustainable water management. Led by Griffith Law School's Associate Professor Poh-Ling Tan, the project sees Griffith working in partnership with the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) research hub. TRaCK receives major funding through the Australian Government's Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities initiative, the Australian Government's Raising National Water Standards Program, Land and Water Australia and the Queensland Government's Smart State Innovation Fund.



SOCIAL INCLUSION

WHAT WOULD A TRULY
INCLUSIVE SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?

KRIS OLSSON REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY **CHRIS STACEY**

It's a difficult notion for citizens of the lucky country to unravel, but some of us haven't been so lucky. Some of us haven't been beneficiaries of the resources boom and bull markets and property deals, but have, in fact, been trapped in less visible cycles of poverty and disadvantage, held back by a physical or intellectual disability, or alienated by attitudes to our colour or religion or race.





But two words—*social inclusion*—are being heard more and more in the corridors of Australian government, universities, community and welfare agencies, and big business. Broadly, the term means the empowerment of individuals to participate as fully as possible in society—though for those with the lived experience of *exclusion*, that can sound hollow, as Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard acknowledged when she launched her party’s social inclusion policy last year.

“This won’t be a memorial to good intentions,” she said, promising “action and hard-headed economics” in the Government’s push to make Australia live up to its old moniker, The Land of the Fair Go. But how do you go from good intentions to good policy? What does a truly fair society look like, especially to those who have lived outside it? And where does higher education fit in that picture?

When I first became involved with the Brisbane organisation Sisters Inside nearly a decade ago, I’d never heard of the term “social exclusion” and thought women in prison were there because they just hadn’t made enough effort. As the daughter of a European migrant I’d grown up with “hard work” as a mantra. It delivered just about everything: a good education, a job, a house, success. And while I had enormous empathy for the underdog and the disadvantaged, part of me believed that if you had nothing it was a choice, you just hadn’t worked hard enough.

But Sisters Inside—internationally acclaimed for its work with and advocacy for the human rights of women in prison—gave me a swift and profound lesson in the true ways of the world.

Criminalised women, I know now, arguably represent the very essence of social exclusion. They are potent symbols of the “other” in our communities. Prior to going to prison, 98 per cent of them have experienced physical abuse, 89 per cent have experienced sexual abuse or assault, and a great many of them have experienced poverty, in families that are dysfunctional and abusive, in which they are not valued.

The effects of poverty and abuse mean most have a low level of education, low levels of self-esteem and few skills. The attempts that many make to self-medicate, to deal with the pain of their lives, mean a great proportion have addictions to drugs or alcohol. Their health is characteristically poor, and many have mental health issues that have not been addressed. Prisons, in fact, have become the de facto psychiatric institutions of our communities, where behaviours are rarely treated and often punished.

A high proportion of incarcerated women are of course indigenous. And for them, everything mentioned above is multiplied. Multiplied, exacerbated, and getting worse all the time. Some are from culturally diverse backgrounds, and for them those things are also multiplied.

The prison experience of all women then deepens their exclusion: they find employment and stable housing difficult to obtain, they face alienation from their children, families and communities, and they lose any ability they might have had to be heard. These are all factors that prevent people from fully participating in our society—quite simply, they keep people out.

So when Sisters Inside Director Debbie Kilroy talks about the human rights of women in prison, she’s talking about a very delicate thing. “It’s a notion most of these women have given up on,” she says. “Their human rights have been compromised well before they got to prison—their rights to shelter, to safety, to health and dignity. They begin to think human rights are things other people have. Their lives, and the experience of being a prisoner, does that to you.”

While social exclusion does not imply a permanent and irreversible social status, the various strands of disadvantage are dense and interconnected—unemployment, inadequate education or training, health and housing, a lack of connection with the community, as well as that community’s location. Researchers point to the concentration of the markers of disadvantage in a tiny percentage of localities. For example, ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service) says the risk of social exclusion is much higher in “poverty postcodes”—“where financial hardship and social exclusion reinforce each other, as they do in many indigenous communities”.

Research by Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia has identified postcodes in each state where an accumulation of factors has had a “serious impact upon the wellbeing of residents of a disadvantaged area”. Targeted measures may be needed in these areas to supplement general social policy, according to their report, *Dropping Off the Edge: mapping the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*.

“THEY BEGIN TO THINK HUMAN RIGHTS ARE THINGS OTHER PEOPLE HAVE. THEIR LIVES, AND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A PRISONER, DOES THAT TO YOU.”

DEBBIE KILROY



“Tertiary education opened so many doors for me,”

says Debbie Kilroy. “It allowed so many more choices in my life. My choices had seemed so narrow—and that was part of why I ended up in prison ... but education provided roads and a journey I could take. Allowed me to be socially included and to connect to a community I had never been connected to. It was fundamental.”

Kilroy’s first degree, in social work, was begun while she was still serving time in Brisbane’s Boggo Road Prison. As part of the then Goss government’s innovative reform programs, women were permitted to leave the prison grounds and attend lectures and tutorials. The trust invested in them, she says, was never betrayed.

After release Kilroy graduated in social work and went on to complete a qualification in

psychotherapy. In 2007 she graduated in law, and became the first ex-prisoner in Queensland to be admitted to practise as a lawyer.

Her academic success and the direction of her life since her imprisonment are directly linked, she says, to her opportunity to participate in tertiary education.

“I see education as a human right, along with accommodation and health. Everyone should have full access to them,” she says. “When I was in prison we were encouraged to apply for courses at university or TAFE. Now educational opportunities in prison are very restricted. We need to change that so they do have access to education, because it actually changes your life.”

Griffith University Vice Chancellor Professor Ian O’Connor says this has major implications for universities and their contribution to social inclusion.

“Universities have a major role to play with their local communities. Some are located in areas of greater disadvantage, and this can provide opportunities for partnerships and programs to encourage connections and to establish early pathways to higher education,” he says.

Professor O’Connor believes such early pathways and connections are crucial to increasing the numbers of young people from backgrounds of disadvantage who successfully complete 12 years of schooling and who then go on to tertiary education or training.

Overseas experience shows this can be achieved. In both the United Kingdom and the United States, collaborative programs between universities and local schools have seen significant increases in higher education participation by young people from disadvantaged areas. The early outreach programs may include funding for universities or colleges to provide mentoring, tutoring, activities to involve parents, and information and support services starting as early as middle primary school.

Professor O’Connor also sees relevant curriculum and course structure as vital in these areas if young people are to experience education as positive and life-enhancing. “We need to attract and keep young people who may not have otherwise considered higher education,” he says. He points to “sandwich courses” which integrate education and work. Griffith University currently offers two such programs—the Bachelor of Commerce (Professional) and the Bachelor of Information Technology @ Work—both at its Logan campus, which serves one of Queensland’s most disadvantaged communities.

Dr Gavin Moodie, Principal Policy Advisor at Griffith University, agrees and suggests that universities may also assist schools in providing broader services and social support out of normal school hours. Targeted funding could link family support services to run within schools without the stigma that often goes with seeking assistance.

“This is the kind of support offered by extended families in other cultures, which provides stability often absent in the lives of people who are at risk. If, for instance, you are on a low income and your car breaks down, there is no question of taking it to the service station because you haven’t got the \$200 to

fix it. So then you can’t get to work, you can’t get to childcare, and so on.

“Some of our institutions could provide some stability for these families, whose lives can be chaotic. I’d immediately think of schools and preschools because everybody interacts with them. And school terms don’t run for the whole year, and school days run shorter than working days. This is very frustrating for parents; finding ways to deal with kids outside of school time.”

Griffith University is already engaging in one such program, the Pathways to Prevention project, in the Inala–Carole Park area on Brisbane’s outskirts. Supported by the Queensland Government but funded mainly from corporate and philanthropic sources, this early intervention program has focused initially on children between four and six and their transition to school, as well as their families and communities.

Overall the program aims to improve the wellbeing of children, to provide a foundation for school success and to develop positive behaviours and relationships, according to its director, Professor Ross Homel. But his goal is also to inform social policy for disadvantaged communities at national and international level.

The program delivers multi-layered services and activities in schools, homes



“THE PROGRAMS ARE BASED ON TRUST FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE OFTEN HAD THEIR TRUST BETRAYED. THESE RELATIONSHIPS HAVE TO BE RIGHT.”

PROFESSOR ROSS HOMEL

and playgrounds. It brings personnel from agencies like Mission Australia, youth services and community health out of their buildings and into schools where trusted relationships have been formed, and interconnectedness established.

“It has taken years to build these relationships, and long-term engagement in the community,” Professor Homel says. “The programs are based on trust from people who have often had their trust betrayed. These relationships have to be right.”

The program has introduced “circles of care” for children with high needs—they may not be performing well at school, are withdrawn and anxious and are acting out their distress with inappropriate behaviour. A small circle of caring adults—family members, a teacher, sister or friend—gathers around the child to offer support and help to overcome the child’s barriers.

Professor Homel says: “The real point with that is that it forces family, school and the helping agency to sit around the same table to talk about the child, and to assemble resources to meet the needs of the child. Teachers can’t do it on their own and institutions have to be resourced to do it.”

Constant evaluation, measuring and documentation of the processes are now delivering a scientific basis, he says, for well-targeted intervention and good follow-up. “It’s not all easy and I don’t want to minimise the difficulties, or pretend we have all the answers. But we are embedded in the community now, and we also have the science. It’s not just touchy-feely. This is a model that has to be taken seriously now.”

Early analysis of the research suggests a range of positive outcomes for children and families, including a reduction in

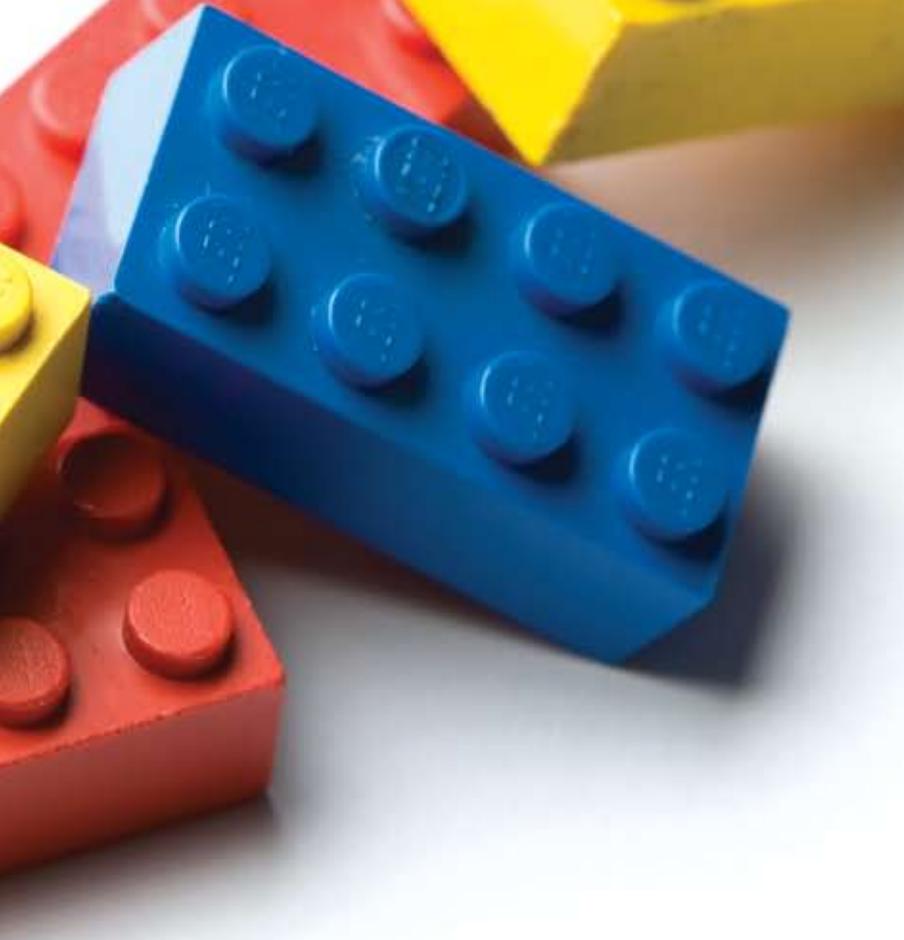
difficult behaviour, better communication skills and greater parental involvement with children.

The next stages for Pathways is for young people transitioning from primary to high school, and then from high school to training, employment or higher education.

At Micah Projects at South Brisbane, social inclusion has been part of day-to-day practice for a long time. Micah’s mission has always been to respond to the needs of anyone who experiences exclusion; through poverty, social isolation, disability, mental illness or homelessness. Through programs like Young Mothers, Young Women, which provides support and early intervention programs for women under 24 with children under eight, the Esther Centre, providing support for people who experienced abuse in faith communities, and the Mental Health and Disability unit, which provides wide-ranging support for people in hostels and boarding houses, the organisation works with disadvantaged and marginalised people “without patronising them, without judgement”, according to its project leader in Mental Health and Disability Services, Mark Reimers.

But Mark Reimers is concerned that any new strategies around social inclusion address the structural issues around poverty and marginalisation, and in ways that are “not punitive and that bring an understanding of trauma.”

He detects an attitude of punishment in our current interactions with those on the margins, and a lack of listening to what people say. “Most of us don’t want to ‘fess up to poverty, or to mental illness, so we come up with other strategies to cope,” he says. “We need to be in tune with what is not being said—educators especially. Drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence are big issues, and a child’s ability to



participate can depend on whether they're living with the post-traumatic stress of those things."

One of the reasons Debbie Kilroy's work at Sisters Inside has been so widely lauded—she has been made an officer of the Order of Australia, won the Human Rights medal, and been championed by activists including Angela Davis—is the way the organisation has been structured to actively include women and to counter the effects of a lifetime of social exclusion.

It began with prisoners, and grew from within. After her release, Kilroy proposed an organisation to deliver crucial services like domestic violence and sexual assault counselling to women inside, and whose steering committee would comprise long-term prisoners or lifers as well as women on the outside who could advocate on their behalf. Sisters Inside was founded in 1994.

"That steering committee inside is the beating heart of Sisters," says Kilroy. "It is the real power behind the organisation; that it is truly in the hands of those it serves. This is the way it stays true to its vision. It's authentic, it reflects the real experience of women. This is its abiding strength. And a direct pathway to empowerment, knowledge and a sense of belonging in a community, a basic feeling of inclusion we all need, whatever our background or experience." ■

Kris Olsson is a writer and journalist. Her second novel, The China Garden will be published by UQP in March. She is on the management committee of Sisters Inside.

FOR DR JAYNE CLAPTON, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND HEAD OF THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN SERVICES AT GRIFFITH'S LOGAN CAMPUS, TRUE INCLUSION WILL HAPPEN "WHEN WE STOP TALKING ABOUT INCLUSION". SHE BELIEVES ETHICAL INCLUSION—RECOGNISING THAT ALL OF HUMANITY HAS A RIGHTFUL PLACE TO BELONG—SHOULD BE SOCIETY'S LONG-TERM AIM, AND SOUNDS A WARNING BELL FOR US ALL ABOUT OUR ATTITUDES TO "WHAT IS GOOD".

"Most concepts of inclusion talk about sameness," she says, "about bringing people in from the margins to the centre. But ethical inclusion requires us to work with difference, not sameness, and to talk about the entirety of humanity."

According to Dr Clapton, many traditionally excluded groups including women, people of colour or different cultural backgrounds, have been more recently included in the centre because the centre has been enlarged, its requirements broadened, to accommodate them. But groups like those with cognitive impairments—people with intellectual disabilities, mental illnesses, brain injuries or dementia—remain on the edges because the centre has been enlarged only for those able to make autonomous decisions.

She uses the example of people with Down Syndrome. "With pre-natal testing, we have made great assumptions about people like those with Down Syndrome, that they are a source of burden and suffering to society. We treat their opportunity to be born as optional. So they remain precarious. We have human rights strategies—that we all have a rightful place to belong and rights to shelter and education and so on—and still people are denied their humanity."

Dr Clapton's own interests in the area were sparked by her experiences working in a sheltered workshop and then as a house parent to five young people with intellectual disabilities who had been institutionalised since birth. She was dismayed at the way people with intellectual disabilities had been "warehoused, out of sight and out of mind, a process of social death" in large institutions, and who were then "miraculously included" through a deinstitutionalisation process and "expected to be moral citizens".

"It was one of the big mistakes we made," she says. "Most of these people had never been in a family, the site of moral development. How can they be expected to have a sense of right and wrong? To become good citizens? Some of them won't ever have the capacity to make those kinds of decisions. So what's 'good' for them? We make the rules. What's 'good' for another needs a lot more thinking. The philosophical concern is still there; what constitutes a good life, and who has access to it?"

In this context the issues for universities, says Dr Clapton, are huge—the university's core business is intellectual competence, after all. And she fears that those from outside the circle who have been allowed in are left feeling like guests, who need to feel grateful.

"But with the right types of strategies we can have success with this," she says. "We can facilitate pathways to education and let people know that university is valuable for all people, not just an elite. It's not hard to do. It's about having awareness, and the will to really pick up the moral imperative in working with the complexity of humanity. It's about opportunity, I think, rather than equity or access, that education is transformative, and a worthwhile pursuit for all."





THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS CULTURE IS KEY TO EQUITY IN LEARNING

PHIL BROWN REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY **CHRIS STACEY**

Maureen Ah Sam remembers a time, not so long ago, when the right to an education for indigenous Australians was still questioned by some. Ms Ah Sam, Head of the GUMURRII Student Support Unit at Griffith University, describes an incident that shows how racism and prejudice cast a shadow over her school days. “I grew up on the outskirts of Brisbane and I can clearly remember the headmaster of the local state school saying, ‘We don’t have to enrol Abos at school, it’s not mandatory,’” she recalls. “That was in the 1960s, before the 1967 referendum. In those days it was different and while it’s still not perfect, we have progressed.”

Ah Sam, who despite her early experience of prejudice became a school teacher, sees proof of that every day on campus at Griffith University. Now that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are undertaking tertiary studies the GUMURRI Student Support Unit plays an important role providing cultural, academic and personal support for indigenous students. “We have more than 400 students here now and a lot of these young people are the first in their family to achieve tertiary education,” Ah Sam points out. “The unit creates a community within a community for them and it is fully staffed by indigenous staff, which helps create a sort of family environment.”

Acknowledging cultural issues that impact on indigenous students is essential and Maureen Ah Sam praises Griffith University’s approach to indigenous and social justice issues as a “breath of fresh air”. But she says more needs to be done, starting at primary school level, to prepare indigenous students for university and life beyond. “Progression is still very slow but things have certainly improved,” she says.

“WE HAVE MORE THAN 400 STUDENTS HERE NOW AND A LOT OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE FIRST IN THEIR FAMILY TO ACHIEVE TERTIARY EDUCATION.”

MAUREEN AH SAM

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the proportion of indigenous Australians who have qualifications including university degrees and TAFE certificates has almost doubled in the past 10 years. A social trend snapshot from the ABS shows the proportion rose from 15 per cent to 29 per cent between 1996 and 2006.

Despite this the president of the Australian Education Union, Angelo Gavrielatos, told *The Sydney Morning Herald* in July this year that the gap between Aboriginal students and the general population was still too large. “We don’t only want to raise the standard, we want to close the gap as well, and that requires further effort for our indigenous people,” Gavrielatos said.

Experts say more attention needs to be paid to early childhood education to ensure indigenous children are equipped for later schooling and eventually tertiary education.

Heeding that advice the Rudd Government has moved to do just that. The day after Kevin Rudd’s historic apology to The Stolen Generations on February 13, 2008, Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard sought to address the issue of indigenous education by introducing legislation to pay for more teachers in remote areas of the Northern Territory. Ms Gillard pledged \$7.16 million for 2008 with a further \$56.8 million to be spent in forthcoming years. “This measure reflects the Government’s commitment to ensuring that indigenous students, wherever they live, have access to educational opportunities that are equivalent to their non-indigenous peers,” she said. The Federal Government further pledged to halve the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade and it believes addressing the problems encountered in remote Aboriginal communities is one way of doing this.

Aboriginal activist Noel Pearson, Director of the independent policy and leadership organisation Cape York Institute, has his own ideas on improving education outcomes

for indigenous children. He has called for indigenous students to be offered scholarships to allow them to leave their communities and attend schools such as Djarragun College in Far North Queensland, a private school that has been an indigenous education success story for more than a decade.

Going away to boarding school certainly helped Craig Ashby, a young Aboriginal student from Walgett in northern New South Wales. He is studying to become a schoolteacher at the University of Sydney.

During World Youth Day in Sydney in July this year Craig was chosen to lunch with Pope Benedict XVI and he raised the problems facing indigenous communities with the Pontiff. “I spoke about how seven years ago, in year nine, I couldn’t even write my name or spell my address until I went to boarding school at St Joseph’s College in Sydney,” Craig told *The Weekend Australian* after the meeting. “From there I finished my secondary schooling and went to the University of Sydney. But the vast majority of our indigenous children are still denied the life-changing opportunity for a quality education similar to the one I was fortunate to have.”

Another strategy for improving outcomes for indigenous students is by encouraging philanthropists to help according to the report *Our Children—Our Future*. The report was sponsored by The AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia and was released in May 2008.

Launching the report, National Native Title Tribunal deputy president Fred Chaney (a former Federal Aboriginal Affairs minister) said the education of indigenous Australians was “a critical national task that needs the assistance of the corporate sector”.

The report identified that: “Indigenous students at all levels experience worse education outcomes than non-indigenous students. Indigenous students demonstrate lower school attendance, retention and achievement than non-indigenous students across all age groups and all states

and territories. Indigenous post-school qualifications, labour force participation and employment rates are also lower than those of non-indigenous Australians as is their general socioeconomic status, health and wellbeing.”

To improve matters the report identified eight intervention categories to deal with the issues, and called for philanthropic investment to complement government funding. In his foreword to the report, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said future strategies to improve indigenous education can be made with “appropriate policies, funding and partnerships between government, education providers and communities”.

Noble aspirations and strategies are important but there are urgent health issues that have to be addressed even before children get to school, issues that are hampering them in the classroom. Dr Lara Weiland, who spent three years as resident doctor at the Kowanyama community on Cape York and co-authored a report on indigenous health, says education and health indeed go hand in hand, and that poor nutrition and hearing loss are two critical factors inhibiting indigenous children’s learning.

“Poor nutrition and iron deficiency are associative with impaired motor, intellectual and cognitive development,” Dr Weiland told *The Australian*. “Malnourished children are less engaged, less active and have shorter attention spans, score lower in school and have less emotional control. There is no doubt poor nutrition impacts on brain development, but I suspect that the contributing factors are more complex.”

Tony Koch, of *The Australian*, a journalist who has been reporting on indigenous issues for a couple of decades, says that if indigenous children can be born healthy and be provided with adequate nutrition and medical supervision the children will at least have some chance of coping once they enter the education system.

“Kids have no chance of learning if they are suffering from health problems, if they

are hungry or if they haven't slept at night," Koch says. "They can't learn if they are tired, hungry or frightened and we have to address these issues first."

Once healthy and at school, however, there are other issues which can be addressed, at least partly, by devising a curriculum that acknowledges cultural differences.

Professor Robyn Zevenbergen, Director of the Griffith Institute for Educational Research at Griffith University, says acknowledging indigenous culture through the curriculum and by using teaching methods can help students thrive. Professor Zevenbergen has, for the past two years, been involved in an Australian Research Council project working with schools in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia. The project has focused on numeracy issues and the teaching of mathematics but the results could have significance across a range of other subjects. Engaging students by being culturally aware has proven to be productive according to Professor Zevenbergen.

"One problem is that some people think indigenous children can't learn because they aren't intellectually capable," Professor Zevenbergen said. "They are capable but you just have to have the right teaching approach. Culture is the key to this."

Having indigenous primary school students work together in groups, using their home language (Kriol) had a positive outcome. "When teachers adopted this approach the students were more engaged and had better results," Professor Zevenbergen says.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ART EDUCATION

The flowering of Australian indigenous art has been one of the most encouraging good news stories of the past few decades. Engagement in art practice has been an empowering experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider audience. Australian indigenous art is recognised internationally and some of the artists who are now hot property came through Griffith University's ground-breaking Bachelor of Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art degree. Program co-ordinator and lecturer in Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Jennifer Herd, is proud of the university's commitment to indigenous art, a commitment that has borne fruit.

"Some of our past students include well-respected artists like Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert and Janice Peacock," Herd points out. "Even though we are a very small program we have been quite successful and we have been going for 14 years now, so people see it as stable."

"I think the program creates a little arts community for indigenous artists here and it's very encouraging. A lot of students also go on to do postgraduate studies, which shows that we have also helped give them a love of learning."

As well as establishing themselves as artists, graduates have moved into jobs as curators and teachers and have become role models for young art aspirants. Artists such as Michael Nelson Jagamarra, Barbara Weir, Gloria Petyarre, Michael Eather, Ian Smith, David Paulson and the late Lin Onus have also inspired students as guest lecturers who have shared their passion and life experience.

Having established indigenous artists involved has been a boon and Herd says one of the most influential has been Laurie Nielsen, who has been involved with the program since its inception in 1995.

She pointed out that the research project was ongoing but said she was encouraged by the advances students had made by being taught in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner. "There is so much potential there," she says.

Unlocking that potential is something that will take a massive effort across many levels of the Australian community and government but it is something that must be undertaken. "The plight of our indigenous students is something that we, as a nation, have to take very seriously," Professor Zevenbergen says. "Literacy and numeracy are critical."

Maureen Ah Sam agrees that creating an education environment that is "culturally appropriate" is essential. "The challenge is for the nation to embrace indigenous people and their culture and history," Ah Sam says. "That was acknowledged by Kevin Rudd in February this year and it was a start, but we have a long way to go." □

Phil Brown is a senior writer with the lifestyle magazine Brisbane News. He is a regular contributor to the Griffith Review and his most recent book is Any Guru Will Do (UQP, 2006)



The program provides a solid foundation in the first year when students study mainstream art subjects, while in the second and third years Australian Indigenous Art becomes the focus. The program is also a journey of personal discovery for many.

"Culture is important and students research their family history and origins as part of their studies," Herd explains. "Not everyone knows about that, some people may have been separated from their community and their culture. So the university is a place they can come and be supported while they learn about that culture. And they don't just learn about remote and traditional culture, they also become familiar with the vibrant new cultures of our urban environment."

Herd, who is a member of the urban-based indigenous art collective Proppa NOW (other members include Tony Albert, Vernon Ah Khee and Richard Bell) says the program is changing and adapting to keep up with the latest developments and directions in Australian indigenous art. "It's an exciting initiative that was way ahead of its time when it was established in 1995."

Above: Darby Jampijinpa Ross
Yarlukari Jukurrpa (emu ancestor) 1999
12 colour silkscreen edition
Griffith University Art Collection

This work features in 'Darby Jampijinpa Ross: Make it good for the people', a unique exhibition developed and toured by Griffith University. It reveals the significant contribution Darby Ross (1905–2005) made to Australian art and culture. Public programs, including gallery tours and floor talks were organised in consultation with the Bachelor of Contemporary Indigenous Art program at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, and bridged school and community groups such as The University of Urban Indigenous Studies, an indigenous youth project aimed at encouraging secondary school students to continue studies in art and culture at tertiary level.

an apple



Putting wellness back into an ailing health system

LYNNE BLUNDELL REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS STACEY

a day...

When it comes to health Australia faces the same problem confronting all affluent developed economies—how to pay for the health care of a rapidly aging population where individuals are living longer, eating more and expecting a better quality of life. Is the disproportionate number of octogenarians going to topple an already overloaded healthcare system in the next decade? And are we focusing too much on illness instead of wellness?

The statistics would suggest the answer is yes on all counts. Chronic disease is a growing problem in Australia with conditions such as heart disease, arthritis, mental illness, diabetes, cancer, asthma and injuries placing an increasing burden on health costs. According to the latest available figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) these conditions, targeted by the Federal Government as national health priority areas (NHPAs), accounted for 36 per cent of total health expenditure in 2000–01.

Look more closely at the ABS figures and it seems we are eating ourselves to death. In 2004–05 an alarming 53 per cent of all Australian adults were either overweight or obese, an increase of 44 per cent compared to 1995. Long-term diseases associated with lifestyle are also on the increase, with 3.5 per cent of Australians suffering from diabetes mellitus in 2004–05 compared to 2.4 per cent in 1995.

In recognition of the growing burden of chronic disease on the health system, the Rudd Government announced in February the establishment of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) to develop a long-term health reform plan for Australia.

Headed by Dr Christine Bennett, chief medical officer at MBF Australia, the Commission will advise the Government on how and where healthcare money should be spent. According to the Government, a key focus of the new body is to reorient the health system by placing greater emphasis on prevention of illness and early intervention. Removing inefficiencies in the health system and forging a better relationship between private and public sectors are also priorities, along with providing greater access based on need rather than the ability to pay.

According to John Menadue, chair of independent public interest think tank, the Centre for Policy Development, if the Government is to succeed in reforming the health system, it must consult the

community. Otherwise reform will be based on managerial efficiency rather than a set of principles. Menadue has some experience in the bureaucratic workings of both public and private sectors. In government he has served as head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet for both Liberal and Labor governments, as head of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and as Ambassador to Japan. In the private sector he has held positions as general manager of News Limited, CEO of Qantas and continues to advise several national companies. He has recently chaired major health reviews in New South Wales and South Australia.

The problem, says John Menadue, is that the community has not been consulted on what it really wants in health care. Until this happens the Government will continue to react to pressure groups, such as doctors and private health funds, with a vested interest in resisting reform.

“An engaged and informed community is the only way to get the health system we need, along with political will. Every significant social change requires this,” Menadue says.

When properly consulted, communities come up with priorities that vary considerably from those of governments. This occurred in the South Australian health inquiry chaired by Menadue, where the community listed as its top three priorities: mental health, Aboriginal health and community-based health services.

These priorities, says Menadue, are not reflected in the way funds are allocated or in governments’ fixation with reducing hospital waiting lists.

“We have a hospital-centric health system in which we regard hospitals as the first resort rather than the last resort,” Menadue says. “Our public debate is all about hospitals—waiting lists and congestion in emergency departments. Ministers produce health plans but they are really hospital plans. All the international evidence is that a health system oriented towards primary care achieves better health outcomes, lower rates of mortality for overall lower cost and greater equity than a health system centred on hospitals.”

Reorienting the health system is a hugely complex task and may require a whole new range of health professionals. Griffith University has targeted this as a growing area of importance and has one of Australia’s first academic programs focused on preventing ill health. The health faculty is comprised of 10 sectors where social scientists

“If we can intervene early we can have an effect on this and also prevent the sequel of many diseases in later life.”

PROFESSOR
ALLAN CRIPPS



“The death rate for people with mental illness is 70 per cent higher.”

DR STEVE KISLEY

work alongside medical professionals. Griffith Health’s research program recently received a boost when the Vice Chancellor awarded it \$5 million in seed funding.

According to Professor Allan Cripps, Pro Vice Chancellor (Health) at Griffith University, this seed funding will allow the health faculty to build an international reputation in the area of illness prevention and early intervention through new systems of care. Current research programs include studies of workplace health, behaviour modification of children to promote good health, community-based initiatives and the link between mental health and chronic disease. Professor Cripps’s own research focuses on developing vaccines to prevent pneumococcal disease and middle ear infection.

“Currently, five children in every 100 born in South Africa and Asia die before their fifth birthday from pneumonia. That is more than two million children who die from a preventable illness,” Professor Cripps says.

The situation in Australia among the indigenous population is particularly dire. According to Professor Cripps, Aboriginal children in remote Australia still suffer from the highest rate of middle ear infection and hearing loss in the world. Addressing this through vaccination will have a ripple effect on many other social issues in indigenous populations, such as learning difficulties and behavioural problems associated with poor hearing.

Long-term benefits to health and wellbeing of eradication of these infections would be immense, Professor Cripps says. “It all comes back to the philosophy of prevention. Middle ear infection and deafness is a predisposing factor for many young adolescents in remote communities ending up in trouble with the law. If we can intervene early we can have an effect on this and also prevent the sequel of many diseases in later life. The result is happier and more productive adults.”

Another key area of research for Griffith University is in the link between wellness and healthy communities. Several projects focusing on primary care and community-based initiatives are currently being run in conjunction with the Queensland Department of Health and local health services. One of these, the Health Mentor Program, aims to educate health practitioners on the importance of health promotion within communities. Another, the Natural Helper Program, aims to bridge the gap between multicultural communities and health services by training “helpers” from within the community.

According to Professor Elizabeth Kendall, who heads up these projects, overcoming the reluctance to use the health system in multicultural communities is a major step forward in improving overall health and wellbeing.

In one project, interactive technology is being used to remove the barriers to healthcare access in indigenous communities. At Beaudesert, a small town 69 kilometres south of Brisbane, interactive screens have been installed to engage youth in the community with healthcare initiatives. In conjunction with the screens the community plans to make a film in which elders will discuss health care.

“A large proportion of people in many communities aren’t getting the health care they need. What we want is to prevent hospitalisation through integrated healthcare systems and access to good primary care. The feeling of belonging to a community is extremely important. It can prevent people falling into a black hole and being lost to the system until they present later with serious health problems,” Professor Kendall says. □

Lynne Blundell is a freelance writer and journalist who writes about finance, health and current affairs. She is a regular contributor to BRW and Property Australia.

Health system fails mentally ill

Where the health system really falls short is in the treatment of the mentally ill.

The death rate for people with mental illness is 70 per cent higher than for the rest of the population, according to research by Dr Steve Kisley, Chair in Epidemiology and Community Care at Griffith University.

And contrary to what most people believe it is not suicide that accounts for most deaths among the mentally ill, but common diseases such as heart disease, cancer and chronic lung disease. Excess mortality from these diseases is 10 times that of suicide, yet this receives little attention, Dr Kisley says.

Studies done in both Canada and Australia reveal that while lifestyle factors such as tobacco and alcohol use, and the side effects of medication, may contribute to the higher death rate of those with mental illness, it is largely due to reduced access to medical care and treatment. Removing the stigma attached to mental illness is the first step in addressing the problem, Dr Kisley says.

“We also need to encourage people with a psychiatric disorder to register with a GP. And GPs have to be educated to be more thorough in the examination of mentally ill patients, rather than assuming symptoms are related to

the psychiatric condition. In addition, mental health service facilities need to incorporate physical examination facilities which contain basic items such as blood pressure monitors and stethoscopes. At the moment this is completely lacking and mitigates against looking after the physical health of psychiatric patients,” Dr Kisley says.



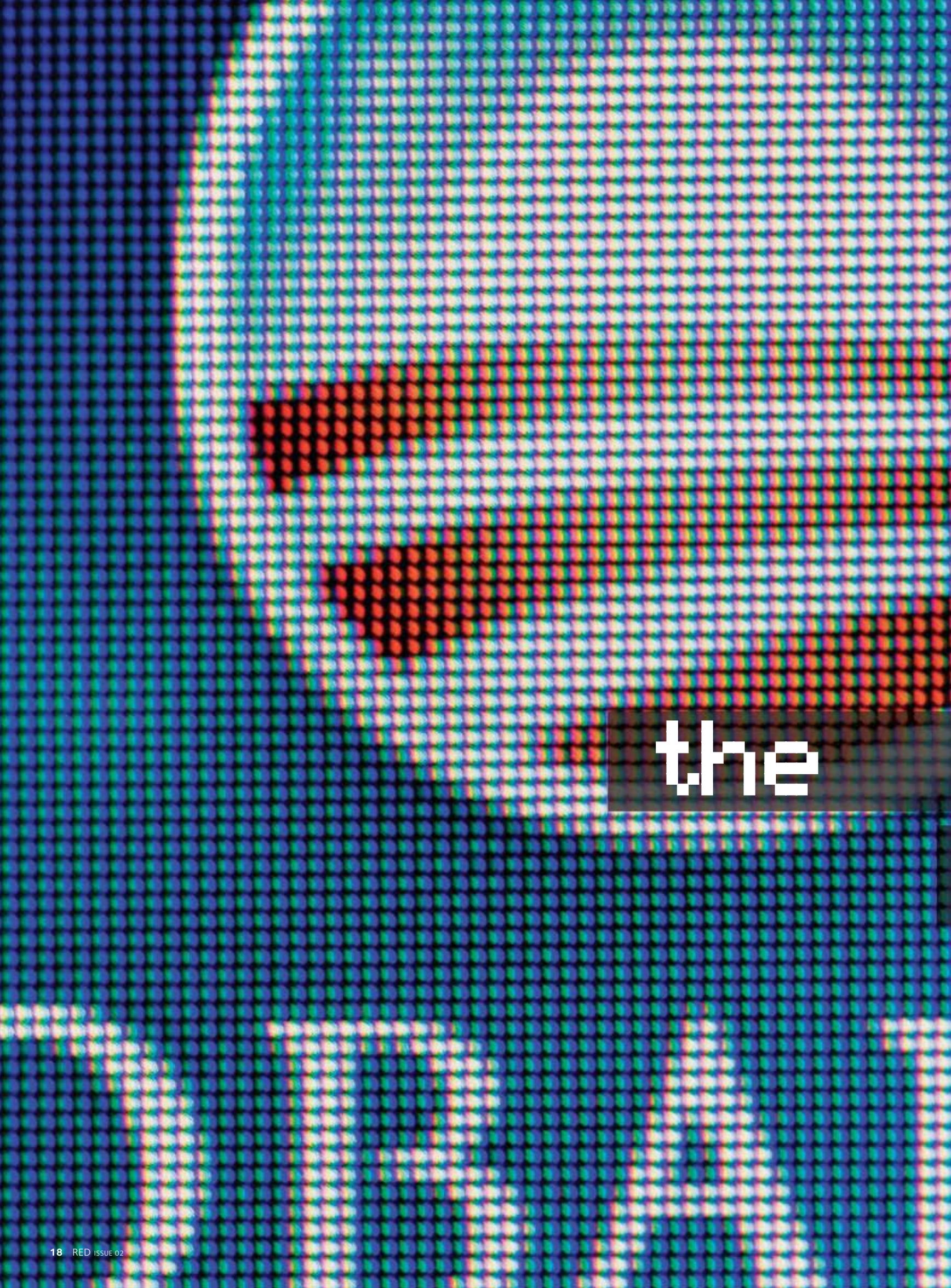
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NEW-STYLE POLITICS DRIVES THE 2008 US ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

JOHN BARRON REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY **CHRIS STACEY**

Much has been made about the historic candidacy of Democratic Presidential nominee Senator Barack Obama and the fact that he is the first black man from a major political party to stand for the Presidency of the United States of America. Much has also been said about his victory in the primaries over a diverse field of Democratic hopefuls including the first viable female Presidential candidate, a Latino Governor and a vegan Congressman who sees UFOs. But while Obama's personal story and gift for inspirational rhetoric has helped him tap a mood for change in the American electorate, his ability to use the internet to organise supporters, raise campaign funds and communicate his message could be what ultimately makes the difference in November.

dot.com
election

“...the youth have not always been the most consistent political actors in America and this election will be a real test to see if things have changed.”

DR BRENDON O’CONNOR

American Presidential candidates have had websites since Bill Clinton won re-election against Senator Bob Dole in 1996, but it wasn't until the election of 2004 that Vermont Governor Howard Dean proved the value of the internet in building an army of supporters. According to Dean's then internet adviser David Weinberger, the Obama campaign saw what Howard Dean did four years ago, and has built on it. "Obama has used the internet brilliantly to get out the vote—taking a mass of people who are excited and turning that into a traditional campaign." Weinberger says that's the difference between the internet campaigns of Dean and Obama. In 2004 the Vermont Governor was unable to turn "mouse-pads into shoe-leather" while in 2008 Obama certainly has.

The official Obama campaign website encourages visitors to register for personalised email updates signed by "Barack" or his campaign manager David Plouffe. If you do sign up, you will be encouraged to attend events, volunteer to make calls to other potential supporters from online lists, and donate money to help pay for all of the TV ads and direct mail needed to get out the vote. Another major revenue stream for the campaign has come from merchandise including Obama bumper stickers, Obama yard signs, Obama T-shirts, Obama beanies, Obama frisbees and even a talking Obama doll designed to sit on your car dashboard and bobble his head rather disconcertingly.

"Obama, as a newer candidate, really needed the internet to drive his support and his fund-raising," says Dr Brendon O'Connor, Associate Professor in the Department of Politics and Public Policy at Griffith University. Having run for the Republican Presidential nomination in 2000, and serving more than 25 years in the Senate, John McCain didn't need the internet to raise his already-high profile, so unlike Obama, McCain's campaign didn't aggressively seek online contributions either. "It was old-style politics," Dr O'Connor says.

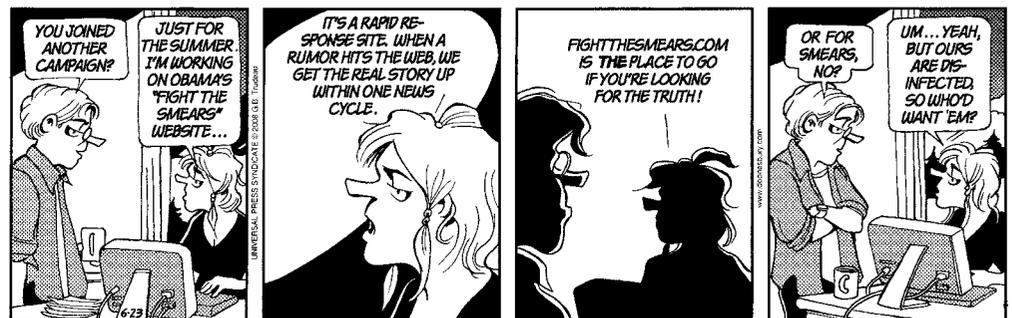
Senator Obama's ability to generate up to a million dollars a day, every day, during the second half of 2007 and early 2008 became

a game-changer. Dave Contarino was the national campaign manager for one of Obama's early Democratic rivals, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. He says the amount of money the Obama campaign was generating, made it simply impossible for everyone but Hillary to keep up. "We thought we'd need about \$US40 million to compete; who knew Obama would raise that in a month?" But Clinton adviser and former US Commerce Secretary

speech that all-but ended his candidacy, Obama's young supporters turned up in droves in Iowa, giving him a crucial first-up victory. Mickey Kantor admits the Clinton campaign was guilty of underestimating the level of support Obama was generating. "It certainly was an over-confidence and a miscalculation in trying to understand the Obama phenomenon, and of course that put her in a position that was impossible to dig her way out of."

Even when Hillary Clinton hit back five days later with a victory in New Hampshire's primary, Obama's uplifting election-night speech inspired rapper will.i.am from the Black Eyed Peas to sample it and set it to music. Obama's words were incanted by performers including crooner John Legend, actress Scarlett Johansson and jazz great Herbie Hancock. The song *Yes We Can* was an internet phenomenon, being viewed more than five million times on YouTube, leading to more hits on the Obama website, and more online donations.

According to Nielsen Online research, even before Obama became the Democratic nominee, but after John McCain had the

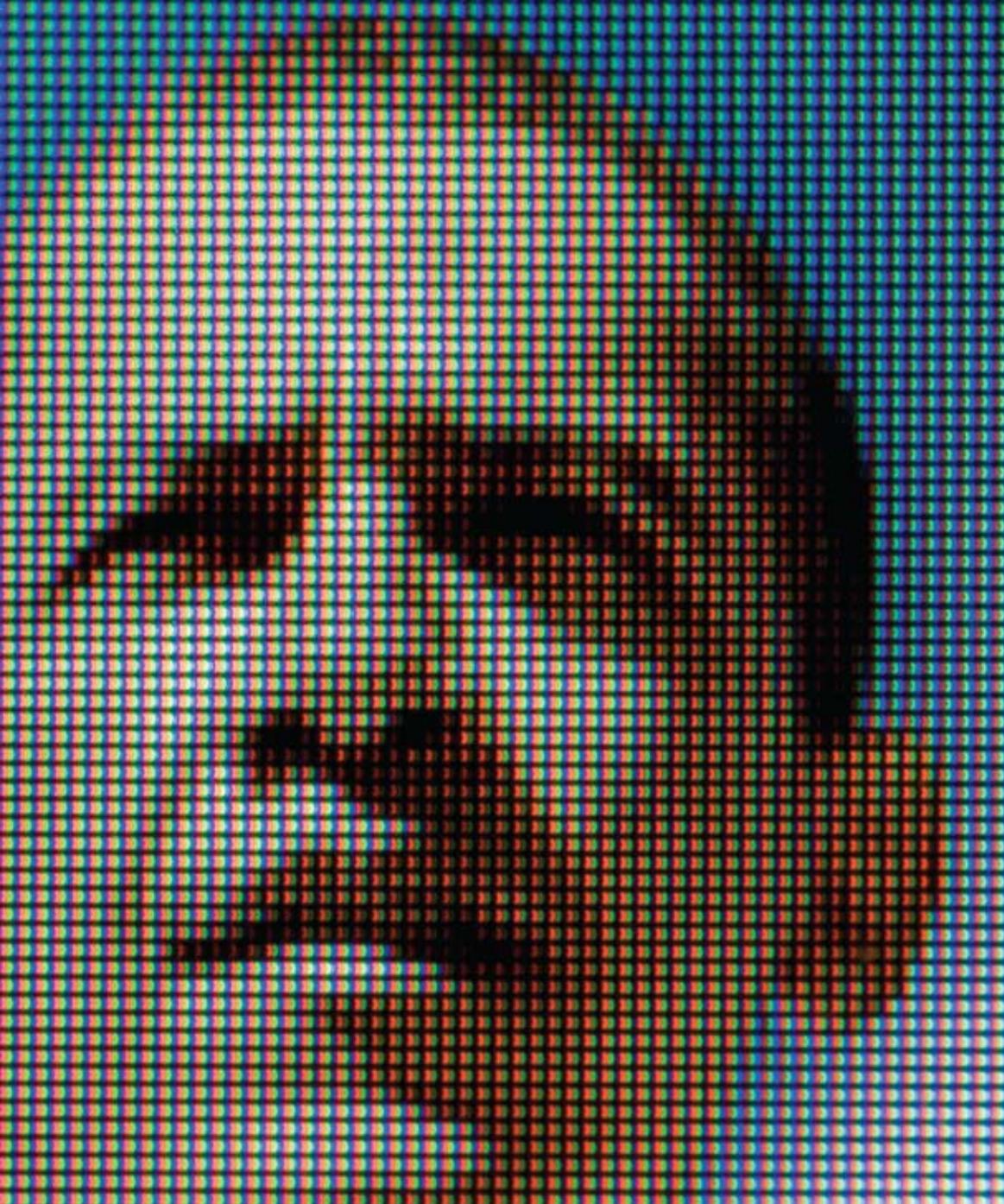


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Mickey Kantor says when it came down to the final two Democrats, it was about more than just money. "Hillary raised \$US235 million; he raised \$US265 or \$US270 million. The difference was not substantial." Kantor says the decisive factor was Obama's ability to organise thousands of campaign volunteers, particularly in the states that held caucus votes, which unlike primary ballots can take hours to conduct. Contarino says from the very first caucus of the nominating contest in Iowa on January 3, 2008, it was clear the other Democratic contenders were up against a formidable and youthful Obama grassroots organisation, maintained and motivated online. "They took every single person that showed up, got them in their database, stayed in touch with them and turned them out at the caucuses." Unlike Howard Dean, whose college-aged supporters largely failed to materialise in Iowa in 2004, leading to a disappointing third-place finish and a rather hysterical-sounding yelp during a concession

backing of the Republican party, Obama was attracting more than four times as many people to his website—2.3 million "unique users" to McCain's 563,000. And that translated into a significant fundraising advantage, with Obama raking in \$US52 million in June to the Republican's \$US22 million.

But while the internet helped Obama gain a decisive advantage during the primary season, raising tens of millions of dollars from more than one and a half million online donors, it also threatened at times to damage if not destroy his Presidential hopes. A persistent email rumour campaign falsely claimed that Barack Obama was a Muslim (his Indonesian stepfather Lolo Soetoro was, as was his paternal grandfather. Obama is a Christian). There were numerous postings on blogs which claimed Obama's wife Michelle had been video-taped using the racially derogatory term "whitey" while in church (no such video has emerged.) And a man called Larry Sinclair claimed in a YouTube posting in late 2007 that he had taken cocaine and



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DAVID WEINBERGER

had sex with Barack Obama in the back of a limousine in 1999. His allegations were reported widely in mainstream media after Sinclair and his lawyer rented a room at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. to repeat their allegation (again, no evidence has emerged to support his claim.) The Obama campaign responded by setting up a website www.fightthesmears.com which debunks false claims made about the candidate and his wife.

Less easy to refute, ignore or laugh off was the so-called Reverend Wright Affair, where footage taken of Obama's former pastor the Reverend Jeremiah Wright in full flight during a 2003 sermon was posted on YouTube then replayed countless times on American cable news channels. In it, Wright details a litany of the US Government's failures, which included: "No, no, no ... not 'God bless America', 'God Damn America!' That's in the

Bible! God Damn America for treating our citizens as less than human!" This was the man who had ministered to Obama for 20 years, who had performed his wedding ceremony and christened his two children. Of course very few Americans looked at the whole sermon; they just saw the few seconds of what seemed to be angry, unpatriotic, unchristian ranting. Obama was forced to first distance himself from Wright, then to denounce him. As the controversy dragged on, Obama delivered a widely-praised speech called *A More Perfect Union* in which he explored the complex issue of race and religion in America. "Obama's 36-minute rebuttal has now been viewed more times online than all of the clips of Reverend Wright put together," says Howard Dean's former internet adviser David Weinberger.

While the internet's role in informing, fundraising and getting younger voters in particular to the polls may have played a big part in the campaign so far, Griffith University's Dr Brendon O'Connor says the lasting impact of the net remains to be seen. Dr O'Connor, who is in the US studying the America-Australia relationship on a fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, says history shows cause for caution. "Howard Dean was supposed to have excited the youth ... some people would say Obama is different, but the youth have not always been the most consistent political actors in America and this election will be a real test to see if things have changed." ■

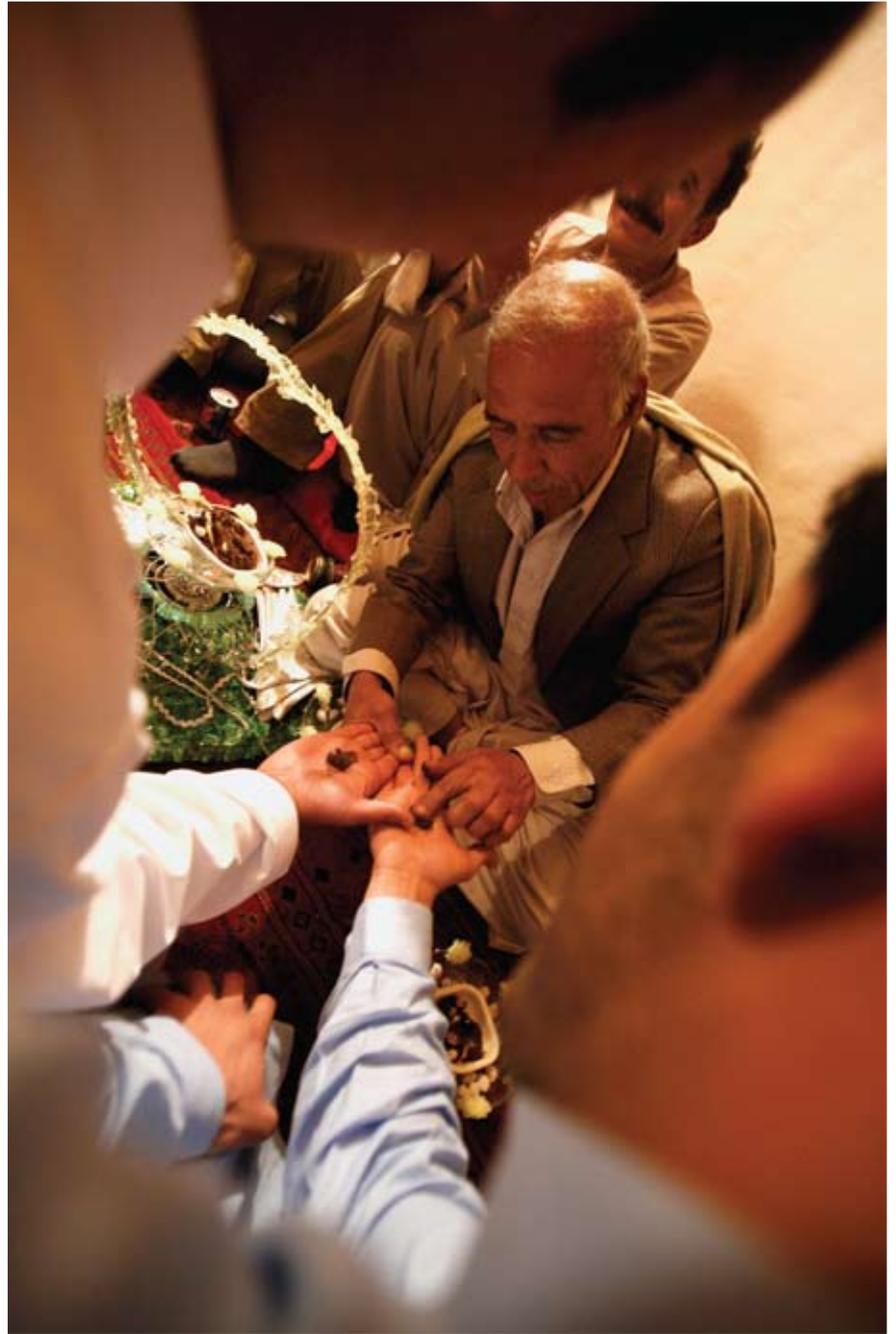
John Barron is an ABC journalist. He presents a weekly round-up of US Politics called The Road to the White House on ABC NewsRadio, and is working on a documentary film and book on the US Presidential election process called Vote for Me!

PHOTOJOURNALISM IS NOT SO MUCH A VOCATION AS A WAY OF LIFE

Introduction by EARLE BRIDGER
Deputy Director Development, QCA.

It is not a nine-to-five job and has little financial security. It is not glamorous and is often dangerous. Yet photojournalism studies at the Queensland College of Art (QCA) attracts the most dedicated students who believe that their images of society's forgotten, alienated and needy citizens can make a positive difference. Our current students work on community projects with real outcomes producing images that inform and challenge society to care and respond. QCA graduates travel the globe working for international publications that also share the belief that documentary images provide a visible measure of a country's social conscience.

The following pages provide a glimpse at the work of both current and graduated QCA photojournalists.



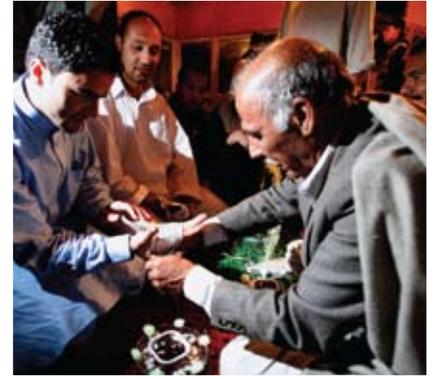
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS AT AN AFGHAN STAG NIGHT

Words and photographs by Travis Beard/Argusphotography.

The Afghan spring wedding season is a celebrative time when thousands of men launch themselves into debt, paying up to \$20,000 for their wedding. The ceremony lasts for three days and on the second day there are both a hens' night and a stag night. The stag night evolves around men drinking a volatile cocktail of whisky and vodka warmed over an earthen pot and smoking copious amounts of hashish. A group of traditional musicians play Afghan classics to which the men dance intimately, constantly reassuring us that "this is not a gay social club". The serious part of the all-nighter arrives with the henna ceremony. Historically the grooms' palms were cut with little incisions so that they could be joined in blood with their brides. As time passed they replaced it with henna so it would be more healthy and less messy. After the two brothers are blessed by their father and given permission to go and marry, other guests are permitted to colour their beards if they desire.

Above: The father of two sons who are about to marry applies henna to their hands. This ritual dates back hundreds of years when instead of henna the groom's hands were cut and the blood mixed with that of his bride.

Right: After henna is applied to the groom's hand, it is wrapped in a white cloth symbolising purity. In Islam, men and women are not meant to have sex before marriage.



Left: After the grooms have completed their henna ritual, other members of the party are welcomed to have their beards hennaed.



Below: The music at an Afghan stag night may be traditional, but the dancing can be very erotic. The men's moves will be similar to the old pastime of a young boy whose purpose is to dance like a woman for the older men. Men in Afghan society cannot watch women dance for entertainment.



OPERATION SMILE IN TIMOR LESTE

Story and photographs by Kelly Hussey Smith

No matter where you grow up in the world, there is no denying that our physical appearance does matter. In July this year I travelled to Timor Leste as a volunteer with Operation Smile to document a medical mission for children (and some adults) with cleft lips and pallets. The mission took place on a US Navy hospital ship called The Mercy, currently touring the Pacific region. Although completely independent from the navy staff, patients and volunteers slept and ate on the ship during the five days of surgery. During this time 76 children had cleft lips and pallets repaired.

In the past my photography has focused on issues of physical identity and how this impacts our social experience of the world. To a degree this project was no different. Aside from the obvious and important health benefits that come from the surgery, the social benefits that come with repairing the cleft lip and pallet are enormous. I witnessed the father of one child cry as he watched his three-year-old son drink juice an hour after emerging from surgery to correct his cleft pallet. I remember thinking that it was a relatively normal scene considering all everyone had been through to get to the ship and complete the surgery. It wasn't until the father explained to me that this was the first time in his son's life that he had been able to drink or eat anything without it coming back out through his nose that I understood the real significance of the situation.



Top: A 17-year-old patient stares at his repaired lip after his surgery. The surgery to repair a cleft pallet is life-changing for older children and adults who have lived their entire lives with cleft lips and pallets.

Above: Patients wait to find out if they are eligible for surgery aboard the ship. Many who turn up for screening do not get operated on due to restricted time and resources.

Left: Genilton de Jesus recovers after surgery. Genilton and his family live in an Internally Displaced Person's camp (IDP) in Dili and were brought to the preliminary screening by a United Nations policewoman who noticed Genilton's cleft lip while visiting the camp.



Above: After injecting heroin, Lal Hmuak Lian sits in a brothel in New Bazar, the hub of heroin dealing in Churanchandpur, Manipur, India.

ANOTHER INDIA: HEROIN IN MANIPUR

Words and photographs by Adam Ferguson

In 2006, India's internal conflicts were listed by Medecins Sans Frontiers as one of the most unreported humanitarian stories in the world. At the heart of this statement are the ongoing insurgencies that plague India's north-eastern states like Manipur, where up to 16 different militant groups fight for tribal states independent of India, or simply a piece of India's booming economic pie. The conflicts waged between militants and government forces leave the civilians of India's north-east living in marginalised communities that are politically volatile and economically stifled.

Amid these tensions in Manipur's Churanchandpur District, a climate of minimal opportunity and high unemployment causes a large number of youth to turn to drugs to escape poverty. With heroin being produced in the Golden Triangle that stretches between Myanmar (formerly Burma), China and Thailand, and a primary trafficking route being one from Myanmar across the porous border into India, Manipur's youth are vulnerable to a surplus of high quality cheap heroin.

With restricted media access for foreign journalists to India's troubled north-east, I visited Churanchandpur District twice in 2007 as a HIV program officer, with an NGO working with injecting drug users. Meeting youth battling heroin addiction on the streets and in rehabilitation centres, people living with HIV contracted through drug use, and families struggling internally with members using heroin, I began to document the lives devastated by Manipur's heroin trade.

In a state already plagued by HIV, the second highest per capita in India, drug use facilitates the spread of disease, imposes health risks and degenerates Manipur society. Every family in Churanchandpur has or knows a user, a local explained to me.

Top Right: Tung Tuang, 24, sits with his mother at their home in Churanchandpur, Manipur, India. Tung Tuang has been using heroin for seven years and lost his brother who hung himself at their family home because he couldn't stop using heroin.

Bottom Right: Lal Hmuak Lian is injected by a friend with heroin in the neck at a drug dealer's house in Lamka, Churanchandpur, Manipur, India.



CITY OF WIDOWS

Words and photographs by Marisol da Silva

In India, forty million women live as widows. Being without a husband often leaves them at the mercy of relatives, the community, religion and charity.

For many Hindu women widowhood becomes a state of social death. Women are expected to renounce symbols of sexuality and lead an austere life. As such thousands of Hindu widows continue to migrate to Vrindavan, the birthplace of Krishna, in the hope of finding spiritual peace and a means of surviving by begging from pilgrims or chanting in ashrams for a few rupees.

In Islamic Kashmir the remarriage of widows is permitted, but culturally rare, as women do not wish to abandon their first children to remarry. The war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has left thousands widowed, orphaned, and vulnerable to exploitation. The "half-widows"—the women whose husbands have "disappeared"—live in agonising uncertainty as to their fate. And because they are not 'widows' they cannot claim the meagre compensation given by the Indian state government.

Across India cultural diversity creates specific reasons for social marginalisation. However for millions of women living with the stigma of widowhood, the day-to-day issues of survival become much the same.



Above: Mahajabeena finishes her prayer in Jamina Masjid, Nowhatta, Srinagar. Her husband left early one morning with his vegetable cart and was shot in crossfire.

Top: After a gun-butt to the head by Indian soldiers in 2002, Jamilia's husband died. Living in the old city in Srinagar, Kashmir, Jamila grows vegetables in every spare inch of her courtyard and tailors clothes to support her three young daughters.



Left: A widow leaves the bathroom in Amar Bari—a home for widows in Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, India which houses 120 widows who have been abandoned by family and have nowhere else to go.

Below: Morning in the largest Bajan Ashram, Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, India. Women chant mornings and afternoons for four hours for 3 rupees a session. For Hindu widows bajan (religious music) is a socially acceptable pastime.



THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Marisol da Silva and Kelly Hussey Smith are both completing an Honours year for their Bachelor of Photography (major in photojournalism) degree at QCA.

Adam Ferguson and Travis Beard are graduates of QCA's Bachelor of Photography (major in photojournalism) program.



The displacement of people due to rising sea levels is a near and present danger for island nations.

SARA PHILLIPS REPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS STACEY

stranded

We live in an interesting time. Daily, we hear dire warnings of global food shortages, climate change and the end of cheap oil. You could be forgiven for becoming a little blasé about the latest end-is-nigh prophesy splashed across the front page of the country's newspapers. But what if these doom-sayers are right, and the end really is nigh?

The European Community has labelled a 2 degrees Celsius change in global temperatures enough to bring about "dangerous" climate change. According to Professor Jean Palutikof, Director of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) housed at Griffith University, an increase of 1.4 degrees Celsius is inevitable even if we froze all our greenhouse gas emitting activities right now. The reality of course is that we won't and so temperatures are likely to be much higher.

When we hit a 2 degrees Celsius change, or even before, we're looking at a world gone topsy-turvy. Oceans lapping at seaside homes, bushfires, more droughts, cyclones popping up in odd places: all those nightmare scenarios that Al Gore and his slide show warned us about. The NCCARF is dedicated to developing plans for dealing with these kinds of scenarios.

Professor Palutikof says industry and individuals need to be looking at an 80 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 to prevent hitting the 2 degrees Celsius mark.

Can we do it? "I find it hard to visualise a world in which we have cut emissions by 80 per cent," Professor Palutikof says. "Somehow I don't get the feeling that politicians, policy makers have got their head around what will be needed to achieve those levels of cuts. I think they're all in denial."

Andrew Ash is the director of the CSIRO's Climate Change Adaptation Flagship program. His group works closely with the NCCARF but specialises in predicting how climate change will affect agriculture, ecosystems and urban areas (among other things). He lists the likely changes to Australia's climate as effects such as increased temperatures, more severe droughts, decreased rainfall, violent storms and sea level rise.

The IPCC, (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), a collaboration of around 2000 scientists from around the globe, has currently pegged oceans to increase by 18 to 59 centimetres by the end of this century. But many believe this estimate is conservative. James Hansen, a climate scientist with NASA, believes the IPCC has looked only at a linear increase in sea level rise, and posits that a non-linear reality is more likely. His well considered opinion is that we could be looking at a sea level rise of five metres in 100 years. If Hansen is right, most of the Gold Coast and large parts of Brisbane will be underwater by the time Griffith celebrates its centenary.

While this would undoubtedly be an unprecedented disaster, we don't need sea levels to rise by so much for people to be robbed of their homes. Mara Bun from non-government organisation Green Cross cites IPCC research that estimates a one metre sea level rise will displace 145 million people. "And the great bulk of those are in the Asia-Pacific region," she says. "For low-lying Pacific Island communities and delta communities that are low-lying and exposed to the effects of sea level rise, there is the potential that very serious displacement will occur and in some cases entire island states won't really be able to sustain livelihoods."

Australia, comparatively speaking, is protected from the worst of climate change. We have plenty of higher ground to retreat to and a strong economy that can finance the likely changes required. Andrew Ash says: "As a nation we've got the makings of the ability to cope with climate change a lot better than many other nations. We've got a pretty high standard of living and good governance, so we have a pretty high adaptive capacity."

Professor Palutikof agrees: "Countries that already have issues—poor governance, low adaptive capacity, not enough money, not enough educated people, poor governments, corrupt governments; they have an existing set of problems and when you add climate change to the mix, then these people are in real trouble."

Green Cross

The People's Assembly: the verdict

Professor Jan McDonald from Griffith University was part of the expert panel at the Green Cross People's Assembly. She reports on the six themes that make up the Panel's recommendations.

1. *Mitigation:* The Government should apply revenue from an Emissions Trading Scheme to help those adversely affected by price rises and to establish an Innovation Fund for renewable energy and efficiency technologies. It should introduce an emissions/carbon labelling scheme on consumer goods and tax incentives for renewables and low-emissions research and development.
2. *Adaptation:* Australia should help build the natural adaptive capacity of communities in the Pacific Islands, working with women, youth, churches, and other civil society organisations.
3. *Governance Arrangement:* A Climate Change Commission should be established to drive the transition to a low-emissions future and facilitate adaptation in the region.
4. *Preparing for Displacement:* More resources and flexible visa options are needed to enable resettlement and community integration for future climate migrants. Coordinated disaster response and insurance schemes can support post-disaster recovery of vulnerable Asia-Pacific communities.
5. *Youth:* Support is needed for existing national and regional youth networks to encourage the engagement and education of young people in climate impacts and adaptation.
6. *Torres Strait Islands:* Inter-agency planning is needed to address preparedness, adaptation and emergency response in Torres Strait Islands.

The full Report and Recommendations can be found at www.greencrossaustralia.org

The displaced people will inevitably turn to nations more able to cope with climate change than their own. But this is when things get tricky. As Mara Bun says: "We live in a country where one boatload of refugees played a pivotal role in the outcome of an election."

Millions of homeless islanders may not be welcomed with open arms on our shores. And to complicate matters, unless things change, legally they will have no standing. The current definition of a refugee, according to the UN, is: "A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." This definition mentions only persecution, not what happens when a person's entire nation has been made uninhabitable, or has been completely wiped from the face of the Earth.

It creates visions of a situation in which boatloads of people arrive in Australia with no home to be deported to, but no status as refugees. In the face of this scenario, the Federal Government has pledged \$150 million over three years to assist our Pacific Island neighbours, and has recently announced the cessation of mandatory detention for refugees.

But some nations are not waiting for the Australian Government to come to their rescue; one at least is acting already.

When you think of tropical islands you're probably imagining Kiribati. A collection of 33 coral atolls sprinkled about the equator in the Pacific Ocean, only one is more than two metres above sea level. The far-flung nation has all the white sands and waving coconut trees you could want. But the wide smiles of the friendly locals hide the distressing fact that this island nation will be one of the first to go under if sea level rises are as predicted.

"We have to find the next highest spot. At the moment there's only the coconut trees," the president of Kiribati, Anote Tong, told *ABC Radio* recently. And so the plan is to prepare the 110,000 citizens for a potential move to nations that have more to offer than treetops. But Anote Tong does not want his people to arrive crowded into leaking boats as the last of the islands sinks beneath the waves; he wants his people to be attractive, sought after migrants. "I think it is important that

if our people were to relocate, they should do so as trained, skilled people rather than people coming ... and adding to the problems, their own problems and to the national problems," he said.

Through the Australian Government agency AusAID, a first cohort of 25 Kiribatis took up scholarships through Griffith University at the Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE in 2007, studying nursing or social work. A second group has recently arrived.

Student coordinator Dr Cosette Monk said the students, mostly in their 20s, are performing exceptionally well. "They are showing a great lot of potential in their nursing skills and I'm very happy with that." Dr Monk believes the program is an excellent initiative. "I think the President is a man of great foresight and he wants a good future for his people. That's why he's requested the youth of Kiribati get all the advantages that they could get. He can see that his own country can't look after them or give them the education they need to progress." Dr Monk is confident that the program will soon be adopted by other universities around Australia and overseas. "We're looking at it and refining the program and I think replication is going to be one of the positives from this program."

Similarly, Green Cross is not waiting for the government. "The first step is to have a focal point for debate that is very informed and highly democratic, because ordinary people are actually ahead of their government when it comes to thinking about how climate change is impacting on our community," says Mara Bun.

Accordingly, Green Cross, in partnership with other non-government organisations, Griffith University and other academic institutes, has instigated the National People's Assembly. It is based on a Scandinavian system, in which ordinary people are given information and resources by a steering committee of experts. The ordinary folk then come up with solutions, ideas are then debated and deliberated, with final recommendations being presented to the federal government. The Green Cross forum was conducted at the end of August (see sidebar).

So while the newspapers blare the end of days, there are those who have seen the future and are quietly preparing for its inevitable passage. □

Sara Phillips is a science journalist and editor of G Magazine, a guide for eco-living.



BIG

CREDIT FOR small communities

JOHN KAVANAGH REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS STACEY

Microfinance applies business solutions to a social problem.

In mid-July Robert Dunn made a trip to the northern Indian city of Varanasi, an ancient destination for pilgrims that sits on the banks of the Ganges River, to meet with some business partners. Dunn is the Investment Partnerships Director and acting Chief Executive of Opportunity International Australia, and his job is to make sure that money raised in Australia is distributed to financial institutions in developing countries that will use it to alleviate poverty by funding small business ventures. Opportunity International Australia raises around \$10 million a year for distribution in this way. The money is a mix of private donations and grants from government agencies such as AusAID.

The group provides technical support as well as funds to its partner institutions. It is part of a growing area of activity in the not-for-profit sector in Australia—the provisions of microfinance services.

Dunn says he met with a client of the local banking partner while he was in Varanasi, a woman who made her livelihood from the milk produced by a small herd of cows. She was negotiating for a loan to replenish her herd after the death of two cows. In India the average loan advanced by Opportunity International's partner financial institutions is \$100.

Opportunity International Australia has 10 partner institutions in India, four in the

Philippines and one in Indonesia. Dunn says the best part of the job is meeting people like the woman in Varanasi. “They talk about the opportunity even a small loan offers them and about their ambition to get their families out of poverty.”

He often takes benefactors on these trips. “Many of them are entrepreneurs and they like to see how the money is used. Being business people they like being involved in a program that is applying business solutions to a social problem. And they like the thought that their funding will be recycled; when the loan is repaid the money can be used to fund another business.”

There are no figures on the amount of money being raised in Australia to go into microfinance but everyone involved in the sector agrees that it is growing. Guy Winship, the Chief Executive Officer of World Education Australia, says new projects are under development all the time. Later this year his organisation will launch a website that will facilitate direct contact between donors and recipients of microloans.

Winship says: “What people like about the model is its sustainability. If you hand out grants you might reach a thousand people. If you offer loans that have to be repaid you might reach 100,000 people with the same funding base.”

Winship says people have seen the example of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, established by the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Professor Muhammad Yunus and serving seven million customers, and this has helped overcome concerns about charging what are sometimes high rates of interest to borrowers in poor communities.

Winship says: “I think there is agreement now in the not-for-profit sector that there is nothing wrong with charging interest. For the borrowers, access to the money is the issue. To be a sustainable activity that reaches a large number of people the microfinance institutions must charge interest.”

As much as microfinance has made progress in recent years it is still beset with challenges. Dr Jem Bendell, Adjunct Associate Professor at Griffith Business School, was involved in the organisation of an international conference in Geneva

last September that looked at developments in microfinance and other innovative financing for small businesses in Africa.

Bendell says speakers talked about the ongoing prejudice that small entrepreneurs in developing countries were a bad risk, about the difficulty of matching investors and donors with financial institutions and about the lack of reliable market data necessary to support funding proposals.

An associated challenge is to encourage the development of businesses that are environmentally sustainable. Bendell says: “Yes, there are lots of problems to get normal cash flowing into the kind of businesses we need to fund and create green jobs, worldwide.

“The current scale of response does not match the scale of the challenge. It’s a pity, because the longer we leave it, the more the costs of climate change will grow, and the advantages of being at the leading edge of innovation will diminish. It’s a time for being bold about how to use the financial system to fund what we need—employment—to reduce what we don’t—carbon.”

Winship says a lot of his work involves consulting with financial institutions in developing countries to help them develop the skills, governance and compliance structures and product sets that will allow them to partner with donors on microfinance projects.

Winship says: “Our business productivity levels are so much higher in Australia. We have a framework for doing business and we can use that to train and support financial institutions in developing countries.”

It does not always work. Winship was contracted to work on a project in Bougainville, where AusAID and the Bougainville Government were looking to support the establishment of a microfinance institution. Winship helped design the business model for the institution but the project did not get off the ground.

“There are certain preconditions you need for microfinance to be viable. This is the great lesson of Grameen. You need an environment where the rule of law is strong, where there is a good work ethic in the population and where there is access to markets. It is not going to work everywhere.”

Dunn says sometimes the understanding of microfinance is too narrow. “People assume it is all about lending. But savings and insurance play a role in helping people work their way out of poverty. A lot of the clients are working in the agricultural sector and the thing they are looking for is a way to mitigate their risks. Having a savings buffer or an appropriate insurance policy may be more important to them than a loan.

“In most circumstances lending is the core activity but to develop microfinance further we need to think of it more broadly. Sometimes we go into a place and the people don’t need money; they may need assistance in forming a cooperative to deal with a dominant buyer or supplier. Microfinance is about using financial tools to fix market failure.” □

John Kavanagh is a reporter with the online banking and finance newsletter The Sheet.

“The current scale of response does not match the scale of the challenge.” DR JEM BENDELL

Alternative finance in Australia

The alternative finance provider Money Fast received \$1 million of funding in July from the National Australia Bank to use for small consumer loans. Money Fast operates in a part of the Australian finance market populated by payday lenders and other short-term consumer finance providers whose interest rates are often high.

Several Australian states have legislated over the past couple of years to put a cap on the rates charged by short-term lenders. That cap is 48 per cent, a rate that most people would consider exorbitant. Before the introduction of a cap, rates could be more than 100 per cent.

Money Fast lends at 16 per cent and when all the fees and charges are taken into account the comparison rate is 28.25 per cent.

A director of Money Fast, Justin Hatfield, says there are many Australians who, because they have had credit problems in the past or do not have regular incomes, cannot get finance from a bank.

Hatfield says: “We see a lot of customers who get caught up with a payday lender and find it very hard to get out of a loan that has high rates and late payment penalties.

“There is a place for short-term consumer finance for people who are not served by the mainstream. Our approach is to create a business that is efficient and can bring the lending rates down to manageable levels.

“We are using technology to try and push the envelope in this market and create some competition. Our aim is to bring socially responsible lending to a part of the market where consumers have not been well served.”

CELL BREAK

The ethical debate around stem cell research has led to breakthrough research.

TIM THWAITES REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS STACEY

To many of us, it's the miracle of nature: how one cell in nine months can grow into a baby, an independent, moving, eating, sleeping integrated construction of tens of trillions of cells of about 220 distinct types.

The development from that first cell is like the writing of a story. Initially, the possibilities seem almost infinite, but over time as the process unfolds and the end product begins to take shape, the avenues for further development become more and more limited.

That initial cell and the first few generations of its offspring are the ultimate stem cells, embryonic stem cells. They carry the capacity to develop into all the cell types of the body, blood, bone, skin, liver or nerve. As development proceeds, their descendants lose this youthful flexibility. But if the resulting human is to retain the ability to heal itself or renovate its tissues, it must retain pockets of cells—adult stem cells—with a capacity to regenerate at least some cell types.

And that's the magic of stem cells. They heal and regenerate. Whether it be a physical injury such as a severed nerve or blood vessel, or a degenerative condition such as Parkinson's disease or diabetes, the capacity of stem cells to produce new tissue provides new hope of some sort of treatment. No wonder tens of billions of dollars a year is being spent on research into stem cells and their capabilities. And the story that work is unveiling is wonderfully complex.

But it is very much a human story, and as such it has its human complications. The quintessential, young, vibrant embryonic stem cells are ultimately derived from four or five-day-old embryos. At present the technique of extracting and establishing a culture of such cells destroys a human embryo. The ethical argument over this has, in several countries including Australia, led to legislative limits being placed on the funding and conduct of embryonic stem cell research.

The stem cell debate has been passionate, full of insults, vitriol and misrepresentation. But it also has turned attention to adult stem cells with which there are no such ethical problems. So, has this led to more innovative research?

"Probably, the short answer is yes," says Professor Alan Mackay-Sim, director of the National Adult Stem Cell Research Centre at Griffith University's Eskitis Institute for Cell and Molecular Therapies. And perhaps his own story is a prime illustration. He has pioneered and championed the use of stem cells from, of all places, the nose, and he speaks very much from the perspective of a researcher for whom clinical application is of prime importance.

Apart from any ethical considerations, Professor Mackay-Sim says, there are two major practical barriers to the use of embryonic stem cells in therapy. One is their tendency to form teratomas; unorganised balls of cells of many different types akin to tumours. The other is the standard problem of rejection of foreign tissue by the immune system. Employing appropriate adult stem cells, he says, could get over both of those issues.

"I didn't choose this field because of ethical problems. It was a natural flow-on from what I did." As a neurobiologist he had been studying the sense of smell. In the early 90s, he happened on some stem cells involved in the regeneration of the sensory nerves in the nose which, because they are in direct contact with the environment, are at particular risk of disease or injury.

Not only were these stem cells relatively easy to extract but, by early this decade, his research team was able to culture them. "We can grow bucketloads of these cells on a repeatable basis. And they are very flexible." In chick embryos, he says, they have changed into and become incorporated in a wide variety of tissues.

The team recently reported in the journal *Stem Cell* its success in using these stem cells to treat rats suffering from a major symptom of Parkinson's disease, a lack of the signalling compound, dopamine, in the brain. When the stem cells were injected into the affected part of the rat's brain they "either began making dopamine or encouraging other cells to make more dopamine".

The researchers have also begun work using a library of adult stem cell lines cultured from more than 100 people with different neurological conditions, such as schizophrenia and Parkinson's disease.



“I didn't choose this field because of ethical problems. It was a natural flow-on from what I did”

PROFESSOR
ALAN MACKAY-SIM

By using the latest techniques to study the activity of the genes of these people, they have begun to pick out disease-related differences in how cells grow and function.

Others working with adult stem cells have not always been so productive. Because adult stem cells come from the later parts of the developmental story, they have a wide variety of histories and purposes in the body. Cells from different sources differ greatly in their flexibility, applicability and ease of handling. More than one research group has published wondrous results with a new source of stem cells, only to find that others are unable to repeat their work. In the wider community of stem cell research, adult stem cells have acquired a reputation for being fickle and of having potentially limited applicability.

This accounts for the view of people like Dr Alan Trounson, the Australian who heads the world's largest embryonic stem cell research organisation, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine. He argues that you need to understand the early parts of the story, the biology of embryonic stem cells, to be able to interpret and use the other parts of the story, such as adult stem cells, most effectively. “When I was in Australia, I would have said that innovation in the field was to some extent driven by the ethical debate. Over here, it's driven by the science. There's so much going on, it's really hard to keep up. Every month or so there are five or six really astonishing papers altering the direction of the way things are going.”

One of the most important recent outcomes has been to demonstrate the paramount importance of compounds known as transcription factors in the regulation of development. And that has led to one of the most significant twists of direction in the whole stem cell saga. It came last November, when a Japanese research team led by Dr Shinya Yamanaka, announced it had reprogrammed ordinary skin cells into cells similar to embryonic stem cells, simply by adding and activating the genes for just four transcription factors. These cells, known as induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, represent the ability to reprogram ordinary adult cells as stem cells, to create a flashback in the development story.

The new darlings of the stem cell world, iPS cells are being touted as potential embryonic stem cell substitutes without ethical problems. And already a group at Harvard University led by Dr Doug Melton claims it has gone further, using transcription factor technology to turn one cell type directly into another, without an intervening stem cell stage—although this work is yet to be published.

But, as Professor Mackay-Sim and others point out, while this new technology may provide a useful experimental tool at this stage, there is as yet no question of clinical use. For starters, iPS cells currently are genetically engineered using viruses, he says, and they still don't seem to get over the problems of teratoma formation and tissue rejection.

There is one major point of agreement in all of this complexity, shared by most researchers including Professor Mackay-Sim from his therapeutic perspective and Dr Trounson, the embryonic stem cell biologist. Whatever treatments emerge are likely to draw on many parts of the developmental story. Different sorts of stem cells from different sources, some possibly even artificial, will be used for different therapies.

“That's been my push in this debate,” Professor Mackay-Sim says. “If there is a stem cell available, from whatever source, and it can do the job, use it. It doesn't matter whether you can use it for something else or not.” And sometimes not even a fully-fledged stem cell is needed.

Professor Mackay-Sim's group are just about to publish in the journal *Brain* on the outcome of a three-year clinical trial treating people with spinal cord injury. Although sometimes reported as stem cell work, the team has actually been using olfactory ensheathing cells; cells which surround and nourish nerve cells. By building a bridge of these cells across the injury, they have been encouraging the regrowth of the original nerves. They have found this is safe and potentially effective. “You just need to find a cell to do the job.” ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer and broadcaster based in Melbourne. He is the current national president of Australian Science Communicators.



BEYOND THE BOOM

AUSTRALIAN TRADE WITH CHINA SEEMS TO PIVOT ON SHIPMENTS OF IRON ORE ONE WAY AND CONTAINERS OF MANUFACTURES THE OTHER, BUT CONTACT BASED ON IDEAS AND SHARING EXPERTISE IS INCREASINGLY PLAYING A ROLE AS THE RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPS.

JAN MCCALLUM REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY **CHRIS STACEY**

China's transformation into a global economic power is throwing a myriad of challenges before its leaders and they are looking abroad to study how other nations have dealt with change. Griffith Asia Institute Director Professor Michael Wesley says there are growing opportunities to engage with China on different levels as its leading thinkers seek ways to deal with social and economic issues. "As China develops, its society and economy become more complex and interlinked and as complexity builds, you have to be more creative and subtle about how you deal with problems," he says.

Professor Wesley says that China's demand for resources will dominate trade for years to come but he believes Australia can play a much greater role in working with leaders as they seek to build the economy and

Governance Program, a partnership between AusAID, China's Ministry of Commerce and the state economic planner, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

Michael Young finds Chinese leaders have a great appetite for learning about Australian economic and social change. They have asked him about how Australia dealt with the economic reforms of the 1980s as they look at how China can provide a social security safety net to its millions of migrant workers.

Economic and social planners are very interested in federal-state relations and the transfer of payments from the centre to provide services such as health and education at the local level. The Governance Program and the NDRC are working on a three-year pilot in different provinces to trial a payment

benefits from wider engagement rather than attempting to force an agenda on China. He says Australians could learn from China's long-term approach in dealing with issues.

One area of common interest is energy, where the Institute's work on energy reform in China is studying the nation's dilemmas in achieving energy security and sustainability. Professor Wesley says it is inevitable that China's need for energy has rattled the global players who are used to dominating the market. "The simple fact of China's rise is ruffling feathers, irrespective of how it acts.

"China recognises that the global energy market and global resource market are rich boys' clubs. At some stage there will be a renegotiation of the global terms of trade for these markets and China wants a seat at the table when that happens. They are buying

"IF WE HAVE A BROADER TRADING RELATIONSHIP THERE WILL BE LESS STRESS." PROFESSOR MICHAEL WESLEY

improve living standards. He says this will provide mutual trade benefits and deepen the relationship by diversifying the engagement. "When the resources markets become less buoyant there could be some real friction between Australia and China, whereas if we have a broader trading relationship there will be less stress on the relationship and that will restrain any friction."

Debate in China can be surprisingly free and open on how to achieve the Government's goals of modernising while maintaining social harmony and many Chinese want to exchange ideas with counterparts abroad and discuss what models might be adapted for China.

Professor Wesley and colleagues at the Griffith Asia Institute gained first-hand experience of this when the Institute recently negotiated a partnership with the prestigious Peking University, which will involve lectures in Beijing and Brisbane and dialogue between leaders in Asia to discuss common issues facing the region. The Griffith University team was surprised at how keen the Beijing scholars were to engage in discussion and collaborative research based around ideas. "We found people open to different points of view and very happy to talk about the challenges that China faces. Australians can offer expertise in areas such as models of governance, energy, water management and climate change, where China and Australia have similar interests," Professor Wesley says.

It is a view echoed by Michael Young, who runs the Beijing-based China Australia

system that can be simplified and made more effective while still providing transparency and accountability.

"Australian state governments and the private sector should become much more involved in this type of work because they bring differing experience in governance, management and providing an environment to encourage enterprise," says Young.

He says compared with the billions Australia is earning from China, the engagement would be quite modest "but the goodwill building in terms of continued strategic engagement would be enormous."

The financial community got the message 10 years ago when delegations began visiting China and building relationships with regulators and financial firms. Their efforts paid off in June when Australia won status as only the sixth foreign destination approved for Chinese foreign investment under the Qualified Domestic Institutional Investor (QDII) scheme. China is expected to have \$US720 billion of funds under management by the end of this year and some of that will be invested here, but Chief Executive Officer of the Investment and Financial Services Association (IFSA), Richard Gilbert says the relationship is about much more than attracting Chinese savings into Australia.

He says there will be two-way benefits, with fund managers in both countries already discussing joint ventures and partnerships.

Professor Wesley cautions it is important that Australians recognise there are mutual

themselves a seat at the table and how they manage it will be interesting. This is going to be a pretty big issue in Australia-China relations," he says.

He adds that part of China's diplomatic strategy is to reassure its neighbours and Australia sits squarely within a plan to build relationships with countries that have a strong relationship with the United States so that if the US ever tries to activate a containing coalition around China those countries' relationship with China would be too important for them to risk participating. Professor Wesley says that in this area Australia is in a similar situation to many other nations in the region and would do well to work more closely with its neighbours.

"It makes little sense for us and South East Asian states to be working alone in thinking of these things. A lot of these societies have been dealing with China for millennia."

As Australians contemplate the relationship with China on political as well as trade levels, Professor Wesley says contact outside the traditional trading ties will become more important. "The range of these issues suggests we should be thinking about, talking about and doing research on China really very seriously." □

Jan McCallum is a finance journalist who has recently returned to Australia after living in Beijing for two years where she edited a financial newswire.

BARBARA BROOKS TALKS TO ARTIST
DAVIDA ALLEN ABOUT SOLACE,
ADDICTION, SURPRISE AND ZILZIE.

BARBARA BROOKS REPORTS
PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS STACEY

FROM ZILZIE

THERE'S

A PHOTOGRAPH

I found Davida Allen painting in her studio, framed by a large window. We look in at the artist at work. There are paintings hanging on the wall, stacked on the floor, and one on the easel. The building is a big shed with corrugated iron walls. Looking at the paintings in Davida Allen's recent exhibition at Philip Bacon Galleries, I found more windows. There's a painting of a figure in a chair, perhaps a woman, and behind her, a window looking out onto the sea. The figure is like a spirit or an emanation, a metaphor for a human being, Davida says, shaped by desire rather than anatomy. It's a kind of Matisse pink; and the background is dark as night, but outside the window the sea is flooded with moonlight. This is one of the Zilzie paintings. Zilzie Beach is a stretch of sand and tropical sea on the central Queensland Coast, hence the outline of a palm, or maybe a pandanus, and the Keppel Islands. It's a significant place for Davida and her family. Her husband's parents met at Zilzie; and their ashes were scattered there; it's been a holiday place for her family, an unspoiled environment—fishing, surf beaches, casuarinas, and wildlife. Another painting has the artist in her Zilzie studio visited by a scrub turkey.

Davida was born in western Queensland and still lives in the country. She looks out of the window in her studio at home, the one in the photograph, and paints the paddocks with trees, kangaroos, sky. She doesn't talk about these places; she prefers to float in space like the figures in her paintings. The place she does want to talk about is Zilzie. It's part of her history. Davida spent her honeymoon there, when she was fresh from the Queensland College of Art, a student of Betty and Roy Churcher, who passed on to her their love of Matisse and Picasso. This was in Brisbane in the early 1970s, a time of change, sexual freedom, feminism, and radical politics. The art college was part of the old Technical College, near the Botanic Gardens. Not far away was Parliament House, where Joh Bjelke-Petersen was wreaking havoc. It wasn't easy to be a creative worker then, in a state dedicated to development, land clearing, mining, construction, and more development. Davida was lucky to have Betty Churcher as her art teacher at Stuartholme. When her parents were nervous about their daughter being an art student, Betty Churcher talked them around.

“IF WE ARE TRULY
FEMINIST IN THE FULLEST
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IT [SEXUALITY] AWAY...”

DAVIDA ALLEN



Davida was an art student, and she painted; she married, and she painted; she had children, and she went on painting. Painting was, and is, always there. It's the air I breathe, she says. Solace, she says. Addiction, she says. In spite of this, there were long stretches when she stopped. That's how it is. "An artist is a ship at night waiting for somewhere to go," she says. Then, "slowly, insidiously something was happening". There were times when paintings didn't sell, or when she thought, are these good enough? So what keeps you painting? She quotes her husband: "The heroin is surprise." She says: "The high is that moment when you surprise yourself." But it's more than that. "An artist needs dealers who believe in the work."

She mentions Philip Bacon, Ann Purvis, Ray Hughes. She's had recognition, exhibited in Australia, Europe and the US, has paintings in major Australian galleries as well as MOMA in New York. She's written and illustrated books, *The Autobiography of Vicky Myers* and *What is a Portrait*.

Now she's painting windows. Windows are about light, and the liminal; they connect the inside and outside: all have found their way

into her work. We look out at the sea, a storm, fishermen, or kangaroos among the gum trees. Or we look in at lovers in a lit room at night. She paints the intimate, the sensuous, the sensual; she paints lovers, and romance. Lovers with genitals, women with fantasies. She talks about painters and seeing, about her children drawing their parents in the shower, circles for breasts and cock and balls. She refers to indigenous rock paintings, stick figures with large penises. And she talks about her Sam Neill paintings (now donated to Griffith University), and how journalists were focused on them when another painting won her the Archibald Prize. Now, she sees them as about a woman who watches Hollywood images and does what Hollywood wants: dreams and fantasises about a man. A woman fantasises; but a painter also represents her desire. In an interview at the time, Davida said: "If we are truly feminist in the fullest sense of the word, we shouldn't have felt we had to lock it [sexuality] away..." Later she made a film called *Feeling Sexy*, about how to reconcile domesticity, creativity and—feeling sexy.

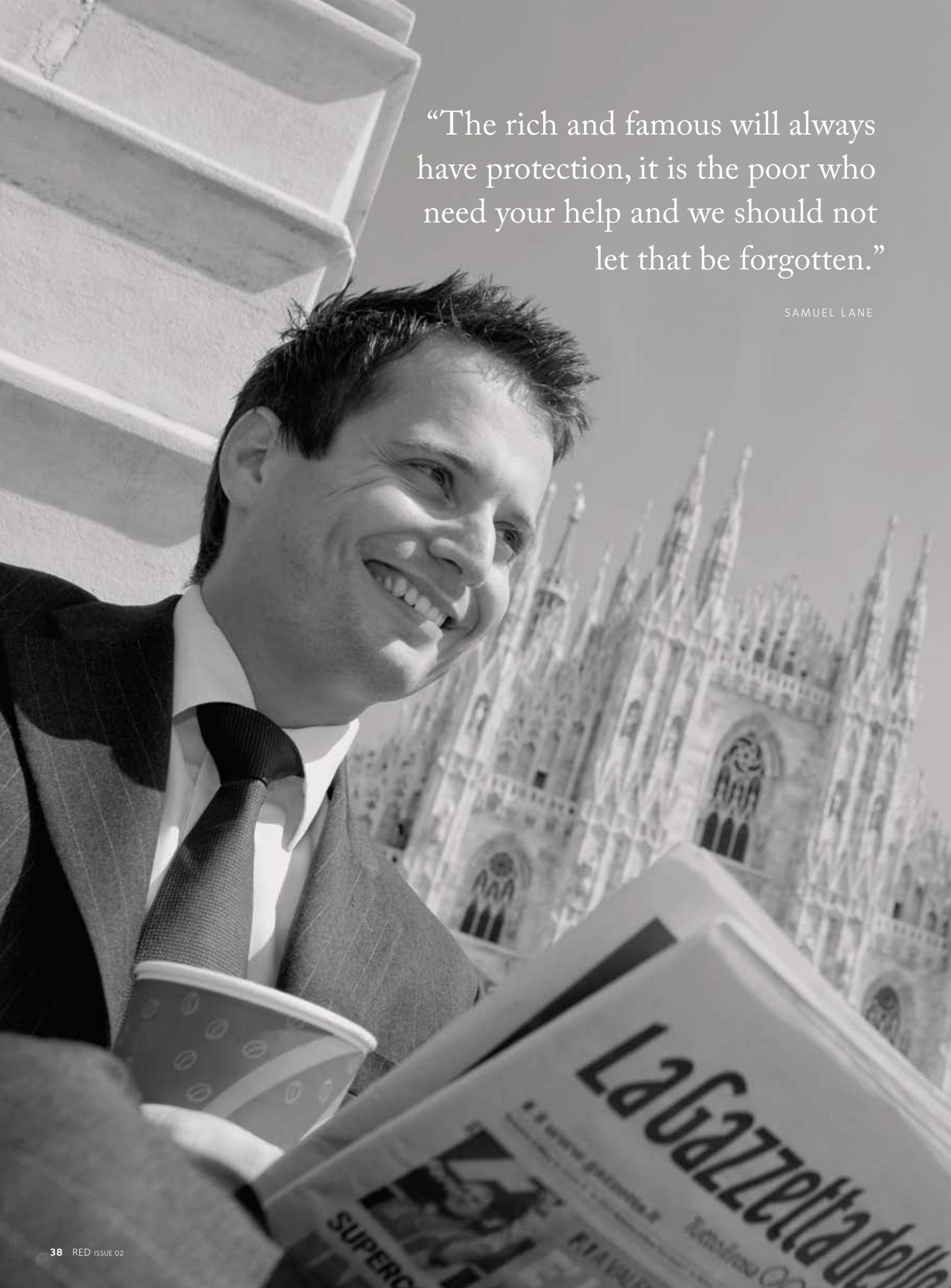
Meanwhile, back at Zilzie: development didn't stop with Bjelke-Petersen. It crept up

the coast. One of the last remaining headlands at Zilzie was about to be built on. Davida's family opposed it. With the help of Dean Wells, then Labor Minister for Environment, an agreement was reached: the developer modified their plans and donated some land for conservation. Davida painted Dean Wells's portrait for the Archibald Prize. But she only won the Archibald once, in 1986, one of the few women to win. This was a portrait of her father-in-law, bare-chested and vulnerable, staring fiercely out, holding a hose and watering his trees. Texture is important in her work, and when this painting was finished she "bashed it to death with a tree branch". After the Ipswich Art Gallery acquired the painting, they rang to say a conservator was looking at it. There are leaves on the surface of the paint, they said. Leave them, she said. Davida told me this story and laughed. Afterwards, I went back and looked for something she wrote in a catalogue: The real beauty of the energy is the possibility of surprise. ■

Barbara Brooks is a Sydney writer. She is working on a book about verandas that link Queensland and India.

“The rich and famous will always have protection, it is the poor who need your help and we should not let that be forgotten.”

SAMUEL LANE



LETTER FROM MILAN

Griffith alumnus Samuel Lane connects with his Italian heritage at one of the world's largest law firms, Clifford Chance, and shares his three years of fashion, food and cultural faux pas.

PHOTOGRAPHY SLATER KING

Let's get it all out there in the open from the beginning—almost all Italian stereotypes are true. Even the most humorous can be found in varying degrees all along the boot of the Mediterranean.

Being born and raised in Australia to an Italian mother and an Australian father, I'd never really gotten the full grasp of either culture. I was always tempted to at least try to fall in with the Italian crowd, but not speaking the language and sporting the surname "Lane", I couldn't really have been more un-Italian. Yet, I had this inner magnetism drawing me towards my Italian heritage and I needed to follow it. Like Christopher Columbus going off in a desperate search for the Spice Islands, I left Australia desperate to find the Italy in me, and it wasn't until I got there that I realised there was very little, if any, there at all.

I have been living and working in Italy for three years now and have seen just about all there is to see when you talk about what is typically Italian. I have met Mafiosi and men, who at 35 years of age, still live with their parents, I have had the pleasure of trying to decipher many of the abundant Italian regional dialects that still survive today (no less than 147 years after Garibaldi unified the country), and I have nearly lost an eye in conversation with an overly excited Italian who just couldn't gesticulate enough.

Yes, life in Italy can be hazardous. If you aren't accosted by a street-roaming gypsy or given a concussion by an old lady buying fruit from her local street market, you're likely to get run over by a Vespa, the driver deciding it would be a good idea to use the footpath to avoid traffic.

But as hazardous to your health as the country is, the lifestyle is second to none. Summer weekends are spent in the fertile mountains or negotiating your way through the colourful lidos and sea of highly tanned and over-exposed bodies covering the over-crowded, cobblestone beaches.

And don't get me started on Italian food. The diversity of Italian cuisine never ceases to astound me, and the fervency with which an Italian will defend his national culinary tradition is rivalled only by the ferocity with which he will defend his mother. It is not unusual for Italians to have three-course meals daily, not that this is really something I have ever (or will ever) complain about.

Employees of any Italian company can rest assured that they will be sitting pretty in the same job until the end of their days, unless they are paid the extremely handsome redundancy package required by Italian

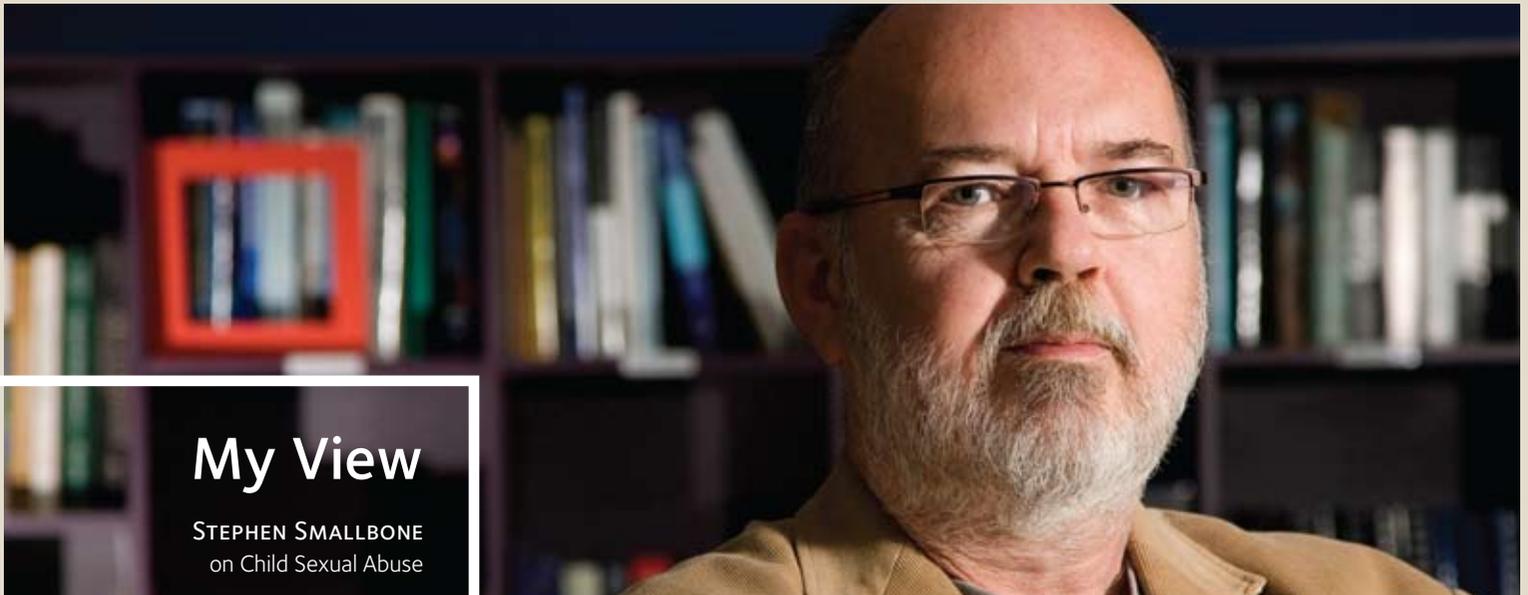
law (around two years' salary, plus bonuses, if applicable). I am hard-pressed to find another country in the world where your employment is guaranteed, regardless of whether you actually decide to do your work or not.

Unfortunately for lawyers in Italy, this is not the case. In an amazing turn of fortune, lawyers working in Italian law firms (myself included) are considered "contractors", whose services may be dispensed with in the blink of an eye. I imagine that some of the more prestigious lawyers of Italy, the managing partners of the biggest law firms in the country, got together one day and decided that it would be a good idea to make sure that they could cut any deadweight from within their ranks without fear of slicing into their equity. Of course, the official line is that being an employee of a company (and obviously not being at the mercy of the redundancy wrath) was in complete conflict with performing your duties well as a lawyer.

Yet, being a lawyer in Italy is not all bad. I am currently working for Clifford Chance in Milan, where I am exposed to an extraordinarily high level of work, which is not generally a reflection of my brilliance, but rather my ability to read and write in English. The life of a corporate lawyer in Milan is generally quite attractive. If you're travelling a lot with work, the rest of Europe is literally a stone's throw away.

I, however, have been one of the fortunate ones. While travelling to London for work has become a thing of expectation rather than desire, I have also been fortunate enough to visit other European cities, which has come about as a direct result of some of the internal continuing legal development programs that Clifford Chance holds for European lawyers—a benefit that I will continue to take advantage of (or exploit, depending on your point of view). By way of example, I spent three days of a five-day working week in Budapest last year where, in between beers and thermal baths, I was further developing my conflict resolution skills and enjoying the views of Budapest from my Hilton hotel room. I will be in Paris in November for the Finance and Capital Markets Academy, and I must develop my palate in anticipation of a plate of escargot.

All in all, working in a big commercial law firm has its ups and downs. But generally speaking, as an Australian lawyer, you can make the big dollars (or pounds or Euros) while seeing the world. And not all law firms are big and bad. Clifford Chance, for example, has established an excellent pro bono group which actually does work that really matters. Recently, Clifford Chance New York was responsible for successfully securing a last-minute stay of execution for the United States' longest-serving death row prisoner, Jack Alderman. Proof, I guess, that the big firms of the world can do something good. But at the end of the day, whichever way you go, you must remember that as a lawyer you have a special obligation to protect those who need it the most. The rich and famous will always have protection, it is the poor who need your help and we should not let that be forgotten. I often liken myself to a superhero—"with great power comes great responsibility." ■



My View

STEPHEN SMALLBONE
on Child Sexual Abuse

PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS STACEY

A great deal of progress has been made, particularly since the 1980s, in bringing the problem of child sexual abuse to public attention. As a society, we are probably more aware and more concerned about sexual abuse than we have ever been. Unfortunately, there seems to have been little progress in disseminating accurate and helpful information to the public. At its worst, we may have succeeded merely in replacing an old set of unhelpful myths with a new set of unhelpful myths.

In fact there is extensive research evidence that can be pieced together to paint a clear and coherent, if complex, picture of sexual abuse. We now know a great deal about how, where, when, to whom and by whom sexual abuse occurs. As it turns out, the picture that emerges from an objective analysis bears little resemblance to the stereotypical images perpetuated by the media and even by our political leaders.

One could be forgiven for assuming that sexual abuse is the most prevalent form of child abuse. In fact, sexual abuse accounts for about 10 per cent of all substantiated cases of child maltreatment. Children are much more at risk of being emotionally abused, neglected, physically abused, or exploited in some other way, than they are of being sexually abused. Indeed, when children themselves are asked about their concerns, they reveal that they are much more worried about being victimised by peers (e.g. bullying) than by adults. Non-accidental death and injury are more likely to be caused by neglect and physical abuse than by sexual abuse. If we are serious about protecting children, we need to pay attention to the many ways in which children can be victimised.

There seems to have been some movement away from the myth of “stranger danger”, although the stereotypical image of the disturbed, strange, predatory “paedophile” remains a very powerful one. In fact most sexual abuse occurs in ordinary circumstances where the child knows and trusts the offender. One of our studies in Queensland showed that 73 per cent of child-sex offenders knew the child for more than one month before the abuse began. More than half knew the child for more than one year. Only 5 per cent did not know their victim before the abuse began. The most common settings for sexual abuse are homes and child-related organisations, where adults (or sometimes older children) are in routine care-taking and authority roles.

It is true that sexual abuse is under-reported. This is also true for other forms of child maltreatment, as well as for other forms of crime. As a rule, the more serious the offence, the more likely it will be reported. Offences by strangers are more likely to be reported than offences by people known to the victim.

Even when children disclose sexual abuse to a parent, about half of these parents won't report the disclosure to authorities. In some cases, parents or others don't believe the child when they say they have been abused, or may even side with the offender and blame the child. In these circumstances the harm for the child can be even worse than if they hadn't disclosed in the first place. More commonly, parents believe that the abuse has occurred, but choose not to report it to authorities because they are concerned that the child will be doubly victimised by having the abuse investigated and made public. In the argy-bargy of political law and order campaigns we often hear calls for the “naming and shaming” of sex offenders, including adolescent offenders. Laws that prohibit the naming of sex offenders have not been established to protect offenders, but rather to protect children who will often be identified by naming the offender.

Most child-sex offenders don't have a past record of sexual offences. In Queensland prisons, about 80 per cent have no sexual offences in their criminal histories. Children are much more likely to be sexually abused by someone with a history of non-sexual offending, and indeed by someone with no criminal history at all, than by someone with a known history of sexual offences. Offender registers, employment screening, and other methods that rely on records of past sexual offences offer little protection in the bigger scheme of things. A much more sensible approach is to provide effective guardianship and safe environments for our children.

Persistent, predatory “paedophiles” certainly exist, but thankfully in small numbers. In fact recidivism rates for child-sex offenders are low compared to other offender types. The best available research, involving more than 22,000 sex offenders from five countries (including Australia), showed that about 19 per cent of non-familial child-sex offenders, and about 8 per cent of familial offenders, were rearrested or reconvicted for a new sexual offence within five years at risk. Preliminary research in Queensland shows much the same pattern.

Sexual abuse can be a tragedy for all concerned. But too often the public debate about sexual abuse becomes bogged down with questions about how best to punish offenders, rather than considering how best to protect children. Concerns about the safety of children, and a clear-headed appraisal of the facts, are easily lost in these debates. Responding properly to the problem will require a much clearer policy focus on evidence-based prevention. ■

Stephen Smallbone is an Associate Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University. His new book Preventing child sexual abuse: Evidence, policy and practice is being distributed in Australia by Federation Press.

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