



Media Summary APW 2019

Quantity of coverage:

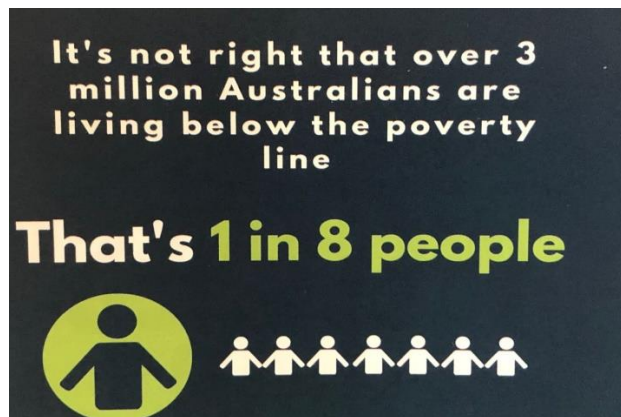
APW, Foodbank Hunger Report & Anglicare Jobs Availability Snapshot mentions 13-19 October only:	Items	Reach
Online articles	182	National
AM Radio	67	143 stations (some national)
FM Radio	48	165 stations
TV	41	151 stations (some national)
Total	310 items	182 articles online, broadcast on 459 Radio & TV stations

Placement of coverage:

The Australian	Covered Anglicare Jobs Availability Snapshot extensively
Sky News	ACOSS CEO long interview David Speers 14/10 plus Anglicare CEO 16/10 plus report on Anglicare Jobs report.
FM commercial radio	~48 items on 164 stations during APW alone
Regional newspapers	APW Media Alert ran as an AAP story in 36 regional media outlets 13/10 plus regional Channel 7 TV NSW & Channel 9.
Regional radio/TV	~70% of Radio & TV coverage was in non-Metro areas (based on analysis of select coverage only)
Influencers, i.e. opinion pieces in major metro dailies, radio interviews/discussions	Laura Tingle Column ABC online and AFR; Insiders Final Observations; 6 Op Ed pieces in major Metro newspapers; Editorial and editorial cartoon Canberra Times; ABC Radio Melbourne The Conversation Hour (Virginia Trioli host).

Meeting our Purpose: *Anti-Poverty Week supports the Australian community to have an increased understanding of poverty and to take action collectively to end it.*

- i) Getting the message out that poverty exists, it hurts us all, we can all do something about it and framing that *“it’s not right that so many people (including children) live in poverty in a rich country like Australia.”*



back page, on sale 20/9/19-3/10/19

Circulation of 31,000 per issue and readership of 303,000 including significant corporate partners.

Laura Tingle Column [ABC online](#) and [Australian Financial Review](#) 21/9/19

“Underemployment is a growing phenomenon. Poverty is a real thing.

Estimates in the Poverty in Australia 2018 report by the Australian Council of Social Services and University of NSW are that there are now three million Australians living in poverty. And they aren't all welfare recipients.

[One in six Australian children live in poverty and rely on food banks every week.](#)

(Let that sink in for a minute).

It's depressing that this issue is so often dismissed as some sort of bleeding hearts issue, rather than one that goes to the nature of who we are as a country and, at a pragmatic political and economic level, something that will provide some really big challenges in the period ahead.”

@latingle Twitter followers: 123,000; Saturday AFR readership 108,000

- 11/10/19 Canberra Times gave picture and large article [Saved from the street and telling her story](#) to Givit APW podcast focusing on people who have left poverty. Also featured on RN Life Matters 17/10/19.



- 13/10/19 Foodbank's **2019 Hunger Report** released. Generated at least 13 online articles, including [The Guardian 12/10/19](#), 6 TV and 4 radio segments.
- 14/10/19 [National Rural Health Alliance Media Release 14/10/19](#) with their CEO on ABC Radio Kimberly and ABC Radio Pilbara, Bunbury and Albany WA plus [South Australia Magic 89.9 FM Radio](#)
- 16/10/19 ABC Radio Talkback forum to mark APW: Poverty in Melbourne and Victoria, [The Conversation Hour Melbourne](#) (Virginia Trioli host)
- One major **State poverty research report** was released: '[Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW](#)' report undertaken by NCOSS in conjunction with the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM). Includes interactive maps and recommendation to raise the rate of Newstart as a solution to poverty and disadvantage in NSW. Print edition of SMH coverage of launch of Mapping Disadvantage in NSW used headline ***Suffering in state 'hard to fathom'***. [Story](#) goes on to say: NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty said the report "*really stresses the inadequacy of Newstart*". "*It also emphasises that so many children are living below the poverty line in a wealthy state with a surplus that increased last week. Yet we are surrounded by poverty. It's hard to fathom,*" Ms Quilty said. 11 online articles, 2 TV broadcast on 21 station and 27 radio segments broadcast on 154 stations monitored on 24/10/19 only.

- ii) ***Getting the message out that increasing Newstart is the most effective solution to reducing poverty in Australia and encouraging action to support an increase***

Media influencers and politicians take action to increase Newstart

- 13/10/19 **ABC Insiders**, Lenore Taylor, The Guardian Editor, final observations: *“Foodbank study today shows 1 in 5 Australians went hungry in the past year. That’s a timely reminder at the start of Anti-Poverty Week. And we all know that the best way to alleviate Australians living in poverty is to raise the rate of Newstart,”*, (**Insiders** is Australia's flagship political discussion program and the most watched morning show on Australian TV any day of the week with ~500,000 viewers; @InsidersABC 74,000 Twitter followers; @lenoretaylor 119,300 Twitter followers.)
- **6 Op Ed pieces published online & in 12 major Metro newspapers all cited increasing Newstart as a solution:**
 - 14 October Bev Jowle, The West Australian (see Appendix).
 - 15/10/19 Toni Wren, [SMH print \(online 14/10\)](#) plus The Age, Brisbane Times.
 - 16/10/19 Ross Gittins, [SMH print \(online 15 October\)](#) also The Age.
 - 16/10/19 Peter Sandeman, [Adelaide Advertiser](#), (also online, Adelaide Now & Perth Now 15/10)
 - 16/10 Dr Chris Jones, [Tasmanian Advocate](#)
 - 17/10 Penny Dakin, [Canberra Times](#) (reproduced [here](#) to avoid paywall)

Op Eds reached total circulation 1.655 million (source: [Roy Morgan Australian Newspaper Readership, Monday-Friday September 2019.](#)) Also 6 very positive [Letters to the Editor responses](#) (SMH 17/10/19) to Ross Gittins Op Ed on “Politicians too poor at their jobs to fix poverty.”

Two **Editorials** call for increase in Newstart

- 12/10/19 [“Poverty must be a priority”](#), Tasmanian Advocate
- 17/10/19 [“The Newstart payment is far too low”](#) and David Pope editorial cartoon, Canberra Times.
- 15/10 **2GB, 4BC etc: Ben Fordham Drive show**: Fordham raises questions how anyone can live on \$280 of Newstart Allowance a week. He quotes Anti-Poverty Week director Toni Wren saying the most effective solution to reducing poverty in Australia would be a \$75 a week increase to Newstart. He adds Wren deems Newstart as a 'dilapidated waiting room' for the age pension with close to one in four recipients aged 55 or more. Fordham says people over 55 make up the largest group on Newstart. He points out those people don't want to be on benefits but they can't find a job. Fordham notes the Federal Budget will be handed down in May next year. He presumes there won't be good news in the budget for people struggling to get by on Newstart. (Audience 74,000 2GB alone).

- ✓ 18/10/19 [QLD Deputy Premier supports increasing Newstart](#) at APW Raise the Rate event 18 October – first time Queensland Government has publicly supported Raise the Rate.
- 19/10/19 Mission Australia staff have Letters to the Editor published in 6 regional papers: The Northern Star Lismore, Braidwood Times, Yass Tribune and The Goulburn Post in NSW; the [Hobart Mercury](#) in Tasmania and the Gold Coast Bulletin in Queensland.
- 20/10/19 David Pope editorial cartoon Canberra Times featured on ABC Insiders **Talking Pictures with Mike Bowers** (*Insiders* is now the most watched morning show on Australian TV any day of the week with ~500,000 viewers; @mpbowers 36,700 Twitter followers).
- 24/10/19 [NSW Deputy Premier announces Federal Government should reconsider opposition to increasing Newstart](#) NCOS APW Breakfast.
- 28/10/19, new **conservative commentator support** - Alan Kohler in The Australian: *"The only thing that would have an instant and total pass-through to the economy would be an increase in the Newstart allowance. It would also have the added benefit of being compassionate and the right thing to do; it might even buy some votes for the Coalition."*
- 8/11/19 [Tasmanian Premier comes out in support of Newstart increase](#).
- 14/11/19 **7.30 Report special** by Laura Tingle first question to the three ["Quiet Australians"](#) couples who voted for Scott Morrison was should the Government increase Newstart and 2/3 said an emphatic yes.

Other coverage of Newstart as solution to poverty in Anti-Poverty Week or connected to it:

- 3/10/19 **Why is there poverty in a rich country like Australia?** ABC Overnights with Trevor Chappell, 38 minutes including talkback. "Australia is one of the richest countries in the world – but to what extent is there poverty beneath the surface. Could the Newstart rate of around \$40 a day be one of the major poverty traps? That's the focus for Anti-Poverty Week this year. (October 13-19) Here's Trevor Chappell with Toni Wren, who is Executive Director of Anti-Poverty Week." Headline and summary reflect framing, not one caller disagreeing we need to increase Newstart.
- 13/10/19 **AAP story based on APW Media Alert on Channel 9** ["Anti-Poverty Week to focus on Newstart"](#). Also featured in [The Canberra Times](#) and [The West Australian](#) plus [Channel 7 Prime local Wollongong](#), Armidale, Moree, Tamworth and **36 regional newspapers online**: Perth Now; The Bellingen Courier; Katherine Times; Northern Daily Leader; Blue Mountains Gazette; Goulburn Post; Newcastle Star; Bellingen Courier; Illawarra Mercury; Maitland Mercury; Yass Tribune; The Border Mail; The Islander online; Western Advocate; Bendigo Advertiser; Busselton Mail, Great Lakes Advocate; Muswellbrook Chronicle; North Western Star; Crookwell Gazette; Braidwood Times; Walcha News; Wauchope Gazette; Kiama Independent; West Coast Sentinel; Grenfell Record; Wellington Times; Goondiwindi Argus; Eden Magnet; Manning River Times; The Courier; Boorowa News; Liverpool Champion; Inverell Times.

- 14/10/19 interview ABC Radio Sydney plus 12 regional ABC stations in NSW: **St Vincent de Paul** is calling on the [Federal] Government to raise Newstart allowance by at least \$75 weekly. **St Vincent de Paul Canberra/Goulburn** hosted a [Raise the Rate breakfast](#) for CEOs on Monday 14th to brief them on the campaign. Speakers include ACOSS CEO Cassandra Goldie and a Canberra resident with lived experience as well as Stephen Byron, Managing Director, Canberra Airport. Significant media coverage in Canberra, including WIN TV. Vinnies very active on legacy and social media throughout week, [national](#) and [NSW media releases](#)
- 16/10/19 Anglicare Australia's **2019 Jobs Availability Snapshot** (with State/Territory data break downs and recommendations including Raise the Rate of Newstart.) At least 19 online articles including [news.com.au](#), The Australian, 6 TV and 2 national ABC radio segments.
- **The Big Issue** published a [special poverty edition](#) on sale with their vendors across Australia 18-31 October. Cover story plus Editorial and 4 feature articles: *Line in the Sand* – Three million Australians live below the poverty line, a quarter of them are children. A single mother of three tells what it's like. *Living on the Edge* – Poverty is a thief – it steals your time. *The Long Shadow of Poverty* – childhood poverty lasts a lifetime; *A Way Out* - there are many contributing factors to poverty, but there are many solutions too. (Circulation of 31,000 per issue and readership of 303,000 including significant [corporate partners](#), 15,800 Twitter followers.)
- Editor Amy Hetherington also spoke about this edition on ABC Radio Sydney Breakfast Show 18/10, *Meet the Editor*.
- **ABC TV News 7pm Sydney and Canberra** 20 October featured a Newstart case study of older woman Bernadette from Northern NSW plus poverty simulation at University of Adelaide and concerns about high rates of suicide and mental health problems in regional areas affected by poverty –story introduced as understanding “hidden poverty” as opposed to people who are homeless and visible on our streets.

APPENDIX: Select Media Coverage



OPINION

EDITORIAL

thewest.com.au

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It is worth exploring many ways to tackle school violence

Bad behaviour by school students is not new. Sit down with Australians of more mature years, and no doubt they will be able to recite plenty of stories of misbehaviour when they were still in school uniform.

It's likely they will include memories of fisticuffs on the oval or smoking behind the bike sheds.

But there does seem to be a feeling that misbehaviour now has a different, more disturbing, even menacing tinge.

And it seems teachers are in the firing line like never before.

Another factor which was not part of the school environment in days past is the use of mobile phones to record and publicise violence.

The often sickening acts can be made public minutes after being filmed.

In July last year Education Minister Sue Ellery spoke of "drawing a line in the sand".

"Getting tougher on this issue means we will see an increase in the number of students suspended and excluded from public schools. That's the reality," Ms Ellery wrote in *The West Australian*.

In December, the Government released a new plan under which aggressive and out-of-control students would face a raft of tough consequences.

The "Let's Take a Stand Together" action plan introduced automatic suspensions of up to 10 days for a child who attacked another student or instigated a fight — and pulling out a mobile phone to record an altercation rather than calling for help would attract the same punishment.

The policy said principals would be told to immediately move to expel the perpetrator in the wake of the attack. Exclusions could be permanent or last for a set period of time, such as a term.

In keeping with the crackdown, the rate of pupils expelled from public schools for poor or violent behaviour has more than trebled since last year.

Last week *The West Australian* revealed that the McGowan Government was also pursuing a different approach.

The Government will pour \$250,000 into a research project encouraging WA public schools to take a more "thoughtful" approach to unruly behaviour, and will investigate how schools can turn around unruly or aggressive children without resorting to punishment such as suspensions.

The reality is no single way will offer all the answers, so deploying a range of methods is a worthwhile approach.

And as Ms Ellery has noted, while the Government has taken action to address violence, it is crucial parents do the same. Society as a whole must step up to the plate.



Signed Alston prints are available from www.westpix.com.au or 9482 2378.

Raise the rate to help beat poverty

BEV JOWLE

This week is Anti-Poverty Week. In Western Australia today 500,000 people live below the poverty line; one in six of those are children.

You might not see it, but poverty does exist in our so-called lucky country.

They aren't the quiet Australians. They are the silent Australians.

Silent Australians live with the financial stress of making ends meet; over time, it takes a physical, psychological and emotional toll.

Silent Australians live with the hope today will be the day when one of their many job applications is successful.

Silent Australians live with the exhaustion of struggling to get enough hours at work or juggling two or more jobs.

Silent Australians live with constant hunger pangs barely able to afford one meal a day; while every week in WA, 18,000 children go to school without breakfast.

Silent Australians live with the guilt and shame of sending their kids to school without lunch to eat, wearing ill-fitting uniforms and unable to afford to send them on excursions. In every classroom of 30 students, five children will experience this.

Silent Australians live with the insecurity of having no safe place to call home. In this State 9000 West Australians experience homelessness; 3000 are under the age of 18.

Silent Australians live in fear of ending up in jail and their children placed in State care because they

default on their fines. Silent Australians live with the constant pain from being unable to afford medication, let alone see a doctor or specialist.

Silent Australians aspire to the same dream as the rest of us: a safe and stable place to live, food for their family, clothes that fit and aren't worn thin, secure employment and a reliable income.

It's something you and I take for granted, yet one in five West Australians go without it all.

The latest 100 Families WA Project report, released this week, examines poverty in WA.

It defines poverty as "the inability to afford what most Australians would think of as the necessities for a good quality of life".

Poverty should not be tolerated in a prosperous community like Australia. We should be able to feed, clothe, house and support everyone in a country with such abundant resources.

We need to examine the systemic and structural issues which lead to poverty and inequality, and begin the process to eliminate poverty.

We need to move away from the narrative that poverty is somehow due to personal failure, laziness and other moral judgements.

We need to make it easier for individuals and families to get back on their feet — with dignity; to begin to untangle themselves from the poverty trap in which they're ensnared.

While there are many and complex causes of poverty, there is one simple act which would immediately help people to begin to turn their lives

around and provide some breathing space.

Raise the Newstart rate.

The Newstart Allowance has not budged in 25 years.

So, despite everyday costs for housing, food, clothing, utilities and transport having continually risen, has remained as little as \$40 a day to cover all expenses. There's little wonder that the community services, unions and the business sector, even Barnaby Joyce, are agreed on this.

KPMG just last week called for a \$100 weekly increase in Newstart. This major accountancy firm gets it: not only do those people receiving the money need it, as a community, we need all Australians to be able to engage in our society and economy.

On a sobering note, in the current climate of economic job insecurity, financial instability, rising negative equity in the property market, most of us are one or two unforeseen circumstances, such as job loss, poor health or injury, personal loss or even an unexpected dependent, from falling into poverty.

Surely, we are better than this.

I would like to think as a community, we find the thought of 500,000 West Australians living below the poverty line (among a population of 2.5 million) as unacceptable; and as a community, we would want to begin to bring an end to poverty.

The starting point for change is obvious — and overdue.

Bev Jowle is executive officer, Financial Counselling Association WA and co-chair, Anti-Poverty Week WA

Opinion 23

A \$75 rise in Newstart is both right and smart

Toni Wren



It's not right that in a country as rich as Australia, more than three million people live in poverty including, on average, more than five students in a classroom of 30, which can mean they are going to school or bed hungry. Research shows more than nine in 10 of us agree that "in Australia no one should go without basic essentials like food, healthcare, transport and power".

The most effective solution to reducing poverty in Australia would be a \$75-a-week increase in Newstart. Raising Newstart and linked payments would help reduce poverty for more than a million people, including about 160,000 children.

Increasingly, Newstart has become a dilapidated waiting room for the age pension with close to one in four recipients aged 55 or more. It's also a de facto disability payment, with up to two in five people assessed as having some type of disability and one in four with only a partial capacity to work. Single parents are forced to claim this lower payment when their youngest child turns eight, leading to parents skipping meals to ensure their children don't.

Newstart traps people in poverty and many employers say it acts as a brake on searching for jobs. That's why the Business Council of Australia called for an increase as long ago as 2012. No one believes the pension is generous, but Newstart at around \$40 a day is \$20 a day lower than the age pension.

KPMG's submission to the Senate inquiry said Newstart should be increased by nearly \$100 a week, arguing the low rate "tears at our inclusive social contract".

While all those receiving Newstart would love to get work, a job is not the sole solution to escaping poverty. In 2015-16, nearly 970,000 people who had wages as their main source of income were still living in poverty. That's owing to a combination of slower wage growth and the rise of part-time, insecure or precarious work, where there just isn't enough work available.

The latest ABS unemployment numbers for August 2019 tell us more than 1.1 million Australians are under-employed, meaning they can't get as much work as they'd like. This is in addition to the more than 700,000 officially unemployed.

While interest rate and tax cuts don't seem to be boosting our flagging economy, raising Newstart by \$75 a week would provide a much-needed stimulus. This Anti-Poverty Week, raising Newstart isn't only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

Toni Wren is the executive director of Anti-Poverty Week, which began on Sunday.

THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD 15 OCT 2019



Many are forced to choose between paying bills, filling prescriptions or buying shoes for the children - Peter Sandeman

IN Australia, more than 13 per cent of us are living below the poverty line.

Devastatingly, one in six of our children is going to bed hungry.

This is the stark reality facing many in our community in Anti-Poverty Week.

Bringing together individuals and organisations from across the nation, Anti-Poverty Week encourages all Australians to take action and create positive change to end poverty.

Centring on the United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty tomorrow, the week seeks to increase our community's understanding of poverty and promote long-term solutions to disadvantage.

Ending poverty is an imperative that has moved well beyond the social services sector.

Last week, in an unprecedented move, accounting firm KPMG called for a payment increase of \$100 a week to those in need.

Joining previous calls from the Business Council of Australia and the Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe, the accounting powerhouse outlined the clear economic incentives, along with the social benefits, of raising the rate.

In its submission to a Senate inquiry into welfare payments, KPMG said the Newstart rate "tears at our inclusive social contract" and advocated for a fairer rate that still encouraged financial independence.

Today, more than 800,000 Australians are living on Newstart or related payments.

Anglicare SA is an organisation that supports, works with and advocates for those experiencing poverty to ensure all Australians lead a dignified life.

Through our emergency assistance hubs across the state, we work at the coalface of poverty in our communities.

Daily, these Australians – parents, carers, those living with a disability, students and those unable to secure paid work – are struggling to afford basic essentials.

Many struggle to keep a roof over their heads or food on their table.

They're forced to choose between paying their bills, filling prescriptions for much-needed medication or buying new shoes for their children.

We cannot expect vulnerable Australians to pursue a better life, to seek stable employment or contribute to our communities while they are hungry or homeless.

Once a safety net, after 25 years of stagnant rates, allowances such as Newstart, Youth Allowance and similar payments have become a poverty trap.

As South Australia's largest provider of social services, we do not believe that one-off payments and tax cuts will lift Australians out of poverty.

The poorest in our community need sustainable, contemporary supports to overcome the barriers they face.

Raising the Newstart rate would be a powerful step toward reducing poverty in our

community.

It is within the Parliament's grasp to alleviate the daily struggles of those accessing these payments.

Rather than dismiss Australians in need, or resort to damaging, ill-informed stereotypes, we are calling upon Federal Families and Social Services Minister Anne Ruston, and our Parliament, to show leadership on this issue.

We are calling on South Australian MPs to stand with the 92 per cent of their constituents, who believe that no one should have to go without food, health care, transport or power.

Rather than stigmatising those who are struggling, we are calling on them to partner with the non-government sector, employers and our communities to help Australians get back on their feet.

Raising the rate, by as little as \$10 a day, is an essential investment in those doing it tough.

It will engage and empower. It will create a brighter future for our children.

Together, we can use this week to demand action.

Let's deliver meaningful change to the lives of many living in poverty.

PETER SANDEMAN IS THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF ANGLICARE SA

Adelaide Advertiser
16/10/19, also online
Adelaide Now & Perth
Now

Lack of low-skilled jobs bolsters argument for Newstart increase

SMH 16/10/19

Judith Ireland

There are five low-skilled applicants competing for every entry-level job, making it impossible for some unemployed Australians to find work, new research on job availability has found.

As the Morrison government continues to resist calls to raise Newstart, arguing people should get a job instead, Anglicare Australia says "it is a simple mathematical fact" there are not enough jobs to go around.

In its Jobs Availability Snapshot, Anglicare Australia compared government data on the number of unemployed people who have significant barriers to gaining work with the number of suitable online positions advertised in May 2019.

Barriers to gaining work include disability, not finishing high school, losing your job in your 50s and being a refugee or Indigenous Australian.

As of May 2019, there were 704,700 unemployed people, with nearly 100,000 classified as facing

significant barriers to finding a job. It found there were 18,200 low-skilled entry-level jobs advertised that month.

Based on these figures, Anglicare says there are about five low-skilled job seekers competing for every low-skilled job. Anglicare Australia executive director Kasy Chambers explained this was a conservative estimate as it did not include recent graduates or others who may be seeking to boost their income with a low-skilled job.

"To us, this [report] blows a hole in the 'just get a job' argument," Ms Chambers said.

According to the government's talking points, accidentally released on Monday, in response to questions about Newstart, MPs are supposed to note: "the best form of welfare is a job. And the government is absolutely focussed on getting people off welfare and into work".

Anglicare's report found the low-skilled jobs are "drying up" due to labour market changes and a growing emphasis on more complex jobs. This year, only 10 per

cent of job vacancies did not require qualifications or work experience, down from 22 per cent in 2006.

Along with an immediate increase to the rate of Newstart, which is about \$40 a day for a single person, Anglicare said the payment should be set by an independent commission, to take it out of the hands of politicians.

Employment Minister Michaelia Cash said almost 1.5 million jobs had been created since the Coalition won government in 2013.

"The labour market is constantly providing opportunities for unemployed people," she said.

She added the government spent "billions every year to provide job seekers of all abilities the best opportunity for employment that works for them".

The government announced an overhaul of unemployment services before the election. Senator Cash said the national rollout - due in 2022 - will "redirect resources to be better spent on those who face the greatest barriers in the job market".

Morrison's too poor to fix poverty



If the PM adhered to his Christian principles, he'd be helping instead of punishing, writes **Ross Gittins**.

You could be forgiven for not knowing this is anti-poverty week. The poor, as we know, are always with us – which is great because it means we can focus on our own problems and worry about the poor's problems later. We can fight to protect our tax breaks, then get around to wondering about how easy we'd find it to be living on \$280 a week from the Pollyanna-named Newstart allowance.

But it's not just our natural tendency to let our own problems loom larger than other people's. It's also that, as property prices make our cities ever more stratified, we so rarely meet people from the poorer parts of town. We find it hard to imagine how hard they find it to make ends meet, and to lift themselves out of the hole they've fallen into. Why can't they work as hard as I do? (Short answer: because they can't find anyone willing to give them a job.) Why can't they budget as carefully as I would if I were in their position? (Short answer: you have no idea how carefully they have to watch their pennies.)

The question we should be asking, but rarely do, is: why hasn't their luck been as good as mine? Why didn't they choose their parents more wisely? Why didn't they go to a better school? Why can't they afford health and car insurance? Why don't they have a few thou in the bank in case of emergency? Why don't they have well-placed relatives and friends to help them find a job or talk their way out of a problem with the authorities?

One of the many things the Salvos (my co-religionists) do to help the disadvantaged is run a financial counselling service called Moneycare. I've been reading some of their recent reports, most of them prepared by the Salvos' research analyst, Lerisca Lensun. It probably won't surprise you that the number of people seeking help has increased by more than 40 per cent over the past five years. Most are there

because of an unexpected change in their financial circumstances – they've lost their job or lost income, they or a family member have acquired a serious illness, or they're victims of domestic violence.

The main issues they present with are managing their debt, or managing their budget. More than a third of people in the sample had financial difficulties arising from health problems. More than 60 per cent of those needing financial counselling are women. The median income was \$535 a week, less than 40 per cent of an average Australian's income and well below the poverty line.

A quarter are on Newstart and another fifth on the disability support pension. Almost half rent privately and, of these, 45 per cent suffer housing stress (paying more than 30 per cent of their disposable income in rent), plus a further 26 per cent in severe housing stress. The proportion of those over 55 who are in private rental has risen over a decade from 27 per cent to 42 per cent. Of these, almost 80 per cent experience housing stress. Of those with debt, half have credit card debt, 30 per cent have personal loans and a quarter have electricity debt. Many have more than one type, of course.

Compared with average Australian households, clients spent at least 50 per cent less on essential items such as food and health. Try this story from a 41-year-old mother of three: "Go without the main meal and just provide for the children. Before payment arrangements were organised, I would put off paying electricity and gas bills to pay for other things due."

Or this sick 26-year-old woman, living alone: "When I don't have money



I don't eat and only get the medication I could not live without. Bills and debts get fines. The medical conditions get worse so I end up needing more medication and get admitted to hospital to fix that."

The counsellors at Moneycare – who spend much time interceding with creditors on behalf of clients – say they see no sign on the ground of improved behaviour by lenders since the report of the royal commission on banking misconduct.

They worry a lot about the way unscrupulous payday lenders take advantage of people with pressing debts and no money, greatly deepening the hole they're in. Legislation to crack down on such lenders was introduced to Parliament in March last year, but has yet to be passed.

It never ceases to surprise me that a prime minister so ready to proclaim his Christian faith is so hard of heart

when it comes to people on benefits (age pensioners excepted).

Presumably, he's not prepared to "give them a go" because he's not convinced that they "have a go". As the Australian Council of Social Service has said, increasing Newstart would be "the single most effective step to reduce poverty" – not to mention giving a much-needed boost to the nation's retailers.

But Scott Morrison, so generous in his promises of big tax cuts to high-income earners like me, has steadfastly refused to oblige. Rather, he's working on an unending list of torments for people on welfare.

It's as if he's seeking applause from all those who think anyone on welfare must be a lazy loafer. If that's how you imitate Christ, things have changed a lot since I grew up in the Salvos.

Ross Gittins is the economics editor.

He's working on an unending list of torments for people on welfare.

OPINION



Research shows adversity experienced by children in their earliest years can have a negative impact throughout their lifetime. Picture: Vince Calliguri

As the Newstart debate rages, it's time to give all our kids a fair start

Penny Dakin

OUR kids do better now, and are more likely to do better in the future, when they have their needs met, and when their families are supported to nurture them. But families are sometimes rocked by events they can't control, such as unemployment or illness. When this happens it's down to all of us, and it benefits all of us, to do what we can to help families and kids.

But as we mark Anti-Poverty Week, and the Senate reviews the adequacy of Newstart and related payments, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) is increasingly concerned that the damage Newstart-driven poverty is doing to young Australians today, and potentially for the rest of their lives, is not being taken into account, least of all by our political leaders.

ARACY exists to ensure the maximum benefit to Australia's children and taxpayers. We do so by working to ensure policies and programs, designed to help young Australians reach their potential, are based on solid evidence of what works.

ARACY only fairly recently came to the view that Newstart and other benefits should be increased. We did so only after conducting a significant piece of analysis, funded by the Australian government and using data from the government-funded Longitudinal Study of Australian Children which, since 2003, has tracked the development of 10,000 Australian kids and their families.

The findings of our work are summarised in *To have and to have not: Measuring child deprivation and opportunity in Australia*. The report paints a picture of the extent to which Australian children are having their needs met in key and interlocking areas which research shows are central to a child's well-being: Being Loved and Safe; Being Healthy; Learning; Participating; Having a Positive Sense of Identity & Culture and Having Material Basics. *To have and to have not* compared deprivation levels across the general population of Australian children with those living with disability, those living in poverty and those living in jobless families.

Our analysis showed that children in jobless families are more likely to suffer deprivation than any other group examined. For example, they are more than four times more likely to be homeless than children in families where an adult works and nearly twice as likely to be bullied or face social exclusion. They are also much more likely to face risks to their education than kids in homes where someone is able to work.

In short, we unexpectedly found that living in a home where no one is able to find a job, a home likely to be reliant on Newstart (or some other form of unemployment support) can potentially have a greater negative impact on a child than that child having a disability. But the impacts can be felt by the children and the communities in which they live well beyond the childhood years.

Research by The Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Bupa Health and ARACY shows adversity experienced by children in their earliest years can have a negative impact throughout their lifetime. For example, adult conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer are now being linked to pathways that originated prior to or during the first 1000 days.

This means the negative impacts caused to kids by today's inadequate Newstart levels can be felt by kids and their communities, in forms including higher rates of unemployment (with the perverse outcome of higher social security costs to taxpayers in the future) and an even more stretched health system.

There are already too many Australian kids in families that are being left behind. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) recently found that one in nine families with children had no one in the family who was employed, about 9 per cent of workers were underemployed or unable to find as many hours of work as they would like, and more than 1 million low-income households are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent or mortgage repayments.

Unemployment is on the rise. ANZ reports that job advertisements fell by 10.4% in September. The threat of global recession seems to strengthen daily. We will continue to be told that "the best form of welfare is a job", and largely, that is true. But this will be cold comfort to the kids in families who, despite their best efforts, find themselves driven to poverty by a pincer of economic conditions and a punitive unemployment benefits policy.

This year the theme of Anti-Poverty Week is "Poverty Exists. Poverty Hurts us all. We can do something about it". ARACY's research backs these statements. Moreover it shows that we must act now to save our kids and our whole community from suffering, now and in the future. This Anti-Poverty Week, as we debate Newstart, it's time to ensure we give all Australian kids a fair start.

Penny Dakin is chief executive officer of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.

EDITORIAL

The Newstart payment is far too low

WHILE there is an appealing and simplistic truth to Scott Morrison's mantra "the best form of welfare is a job", we need to accept not everybody will find employment regardless of how strong the economy is.

This was highlighted by Angicare Australia's Jobs Availability Report this week which said there were five "low skilled applicants" for every entry level job.

With the odds already running at one in five against them, it is fair to say those at the lower end of the competence or educational scale, or suffering from a perceived handicap such as age or ethnicity, are on a hiding to nothing.

Why then is this government so hell bent on punishing the most disadvantaged members of our community by refusing to lift Newstart to a liveable level?

The Coalition's intransigence is hard to fathom when you consider former Nationals leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce, definitely gets it.

His "weatherboard and iron" constituency includes many for whom Newstart is the only lifeline available and whose job opportunities, along with access to support services, are very limited.

Angicare said some of the main barriers to finding work, in the regions and elsewhere,

The Canberra Times

TO SERVE THE NATIONAL CITY
AND THROUGH IT THE NATION

Mental health is also a significant, and often overlooked, factor.

included disability, dropping out of school early, losing your job after the age of 50 or being a refugee or an indigenous Australian.

Mental health is also a significant factor. Angicare found that as of May this year nearly 100,000 of the 704,700 people registered as unemployed had "significant barriers to finding a job". This was the group that was competing for just 18,200 entry level or unskilled jobs.

It is obvious at least two things have to be done almost immediately.

The first and the simplest is to increase Newstart by at least \$30 to \$40 a week to give recipients breathing space pending a comprehensive investigation into what a fair and equitable, and livable, allowance would be.

The second is to get cracking on eliminating the barriers to employment, which often have their roots in employers' prejudices and ignorance of people's potential, holding so many of us back.

A single person on Newstart receives \$180 a week less than an aged pensioner the Senate inquiry into Newstart was told last week. This doesn't mean the pension is generous; it reflects the fact Newstart is way too low. Under the current settings being forced onto Newstart through the loss of your job

is tantamount to being condemned to live in poverty.

The problem has been compounded by the success of campaigns by a succession of governments dating back to the turn of the century and before to restrict access to welfare.

It is only a few short days ago that Families and Social Services Minister, Anne Ruston, was celebrating the reduction in projected future welfare spending in the forward estimates from \$6.4 trillion in 2014 to \$5.7 trillion in 2018.

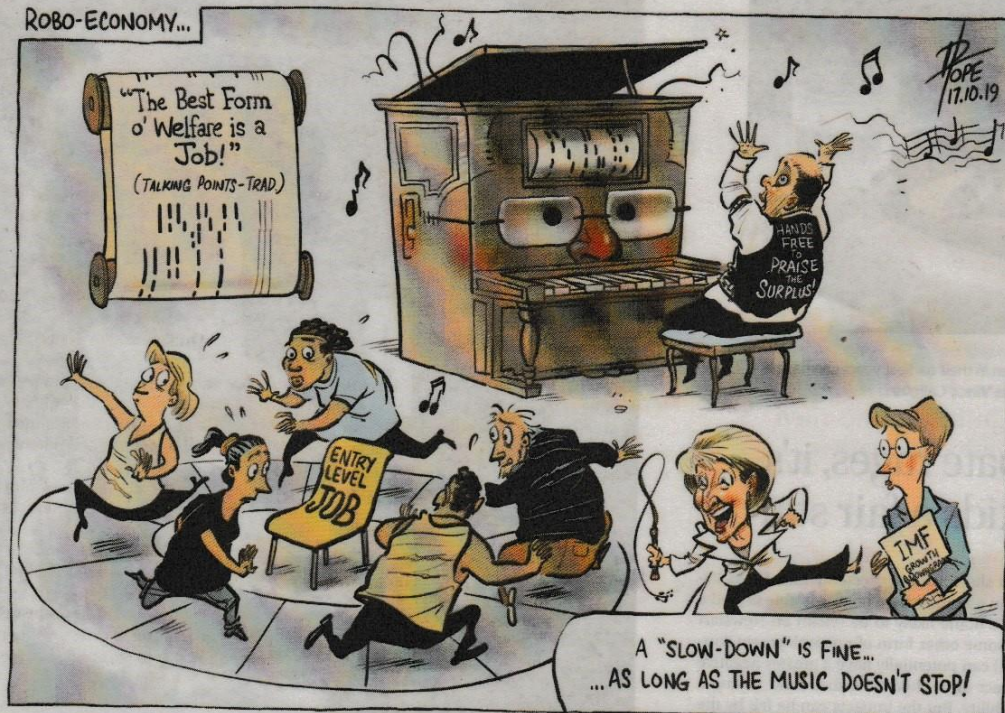
Her opposition counterpart, Linda Burney, noted that despite this the number of people over 55 on Newstart had jumped by almost half since the Abbott government was elected almost seven years ago.

The disability pension, once a meaningful safety net for those with physical and mental health issues which limited their employability, has become progressively harder to get with the number of recipients falling by 10.2 per cent between 2014 and 2018.

The Morrison government has repeatedly said it wants to cut taxes to put more money into people's pockets to deliver an economic stimulus. Increasing Newstart would have the same effect while changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of people for the better.

POPE'S VIEW

ROBO-ECONOMY...



David Pope, The Canberra Times, 17 October 2019, also featured in Talking Pictures with Mike Bowers, ABC Insiders, 20 October 2019

Mission Australia staff have letter to the Editor published in 6 regional papers: The Northern Star Lismore, Braidwood Times, Yass Tribune and The Goulburn Post in NSW; the [Hobart Mercury](#) in Tasmania and the Gold Coast Bulletin in Queensland.

Focus on poverty

MANY of the people we work with at Mission Australia live in poverty.

Anti-Poverty Week ran from October 13-19. This week we need to reflect on the three million people in Australia who live below the poverty line, including 739,000 children. This is unacceptable and much more can and should be done. Ensuring the adequacy of income support is one of the most important and effective ways to prevent poverty and reduce homelessness across Australia. The rate of Newstart remains woefully low at less than \$40 per day.

Every day, we see the impact that inadequate social security support is having on people, driving them further into poverty and increasing their risk of homelessness. Income support

payments fall well short of the income that's actually required to cover bills, food, healthcare, power and the rising cost of rent.

Poverty means families and individuals have to make unacceptable choices, such as whether to go without food or medicine or whether to miss a job interview because they cannot afford the bus. They can be forced into unsuitable and often unsafe accommodation because it is all they can afford, which can seriously impact on mental health and wellbeing.

For so many of the people we help, the overwhelming cost of rent is a significant proportion of their income. Just one small change in their financial circumstances can throw them into precarious and stressful living situations including homelessness.

I encourage you to call on our political leaders to help those living in poverty and urgently increase Newstart and Youth Allowance. So that everyone has enough money to stay well, put a safe, secure roof over their head and food on their table.

**Vanessa Thomas,
Support Facilitator,
Mission Australia, Lismore.**

NORTHERN
STAR, LISMORE
19/10/19

24/10/19 Sydney Morning Herald report on [Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW' report](#) undertaken by NCOSS, launched at APW event in NSW Parliament House. 11 online articles, 2 TV broadcast on 21 station and 27 radio segments broadcast on 154 stations monitored on 24/10/19 only.



“The best way to stimulate the economy would be to increase the Newstart allowance because it would be quickly spent, in full.

By how much? Well earlier this month, KPMG chief economist Brendan Rynne suggested between \$77 and \$83 a week, which would cost about \$3 billion. Seems reasonable.

....The only thing that would have an instant and total pass-through to the economy would be an increase in the Newstart allowance.

It would also have the added benefit of being compassionate and the right thing to do; it might even buy some votes for the Coalition.”

ALAN KOHLER, 28 OCTOBER 2019



EDITOR-AT-LARGE, THE AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS REVIEW

Alan Kohler is one of Australia’s most experienced commentators and journalists.

DEBORAH MAILMAN | CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON | CHOCOLATE CAKE

THE BIG ISSUE

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3
MILLION
Australians are living
IN POVERTY
What are we doing about it?

ED'S LETTER YOUR SAY

MAKE A CHANGE

"BY 1990, NO Australian child will be living in poverty..." It's perhaps hard to believe that it's been 32 years since Bob Hawke uttered that memorable line. But it's even harder to believe that today, in 2019, almost 740,000 Australian children under 14 are living in poverty. That's one in every six kids – and their families.

This edition is on the streets during Anti-Poverty Week, a call to action in the fight against poverty and hardship. It's at the heart of what *The Big Issue* is all about. It's an issue that should be on the national radar every week. Every day.

In this edition, we hear from people about the realities of living below the poverty line. And deputy editor Katherine Smyrk looks at the causes and consequences of poverty, as well as the solutions.

With more than three million Australians living below the poverty line, the situation may seem hopeless, but we know that poverty is not unsolvable. While Hawke later said he regretted his "silly shorthand" remarks, he went on to reduce childhood poverty by 30 per cent. Canada has successfully reduced its poverty rate by more than 20 per cent in two years. As a community we can all provide a hand up, we can all help make a change for those doing it tough.

Amy Hetherington, Editor

THE BIG ISSUE CALENDAR GOES ON SALE FROM FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER. AT JUST \$10, IT'S A GREAT WAY TO SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL VENDOR! DAVE SELLS THE BIG ISSUE IN SYDNEY.



BIG ISSUE BOMBING

You've heard of yarn bombing – where knitters leave behind lovely samples of their work in public places. Well, I've become a *Big Issue* bomber! Once my hubby and I have read our magazines we pass them on – leaving them in various offices and businesses we visit. So far we've left them at the hairdresser, dentist, doctor and vet's offices. Hopefully it leads to someone taking out a subscription. How's that for recycling!
Colleen Page, Colac, Vic

PRIZE

As the winner of this edition's Letter of the Fortnight, Colleen wins a copy of Sally Obermeyer and her sister Maha Corbett's new cookbook, *Super Easy*. Enjoy!



Congratulations to Jarran for telling us about his journey in Ed#596. Your dreams and goals are inspiring and I look forward to hearing how you're going from time to time. The saying, "The longest journey starts with the first step" comes to mind, and you've already taken that important first step by becoming a vendor for *The Big Issue*. Keep going, and know that our good wishes go with you. I'd also like to commend Ben, my Brisbane *Big Issue* vendor, who not only sold me a magazine but also remembered my name the next time I walked past, on my way to the South Brisbane railway station. What a gift, to be able to recall someone's name. It made my day, and put a spring in my step.

Tess Rowley, Wynnum, Qld

Hello from a Hongkonger. I am currently in Brisbane for a month as I am doing a short course in this

vibrantly beautiful city. I bumped into a vendor yesterday and I hesitated for no time to get a magazine.

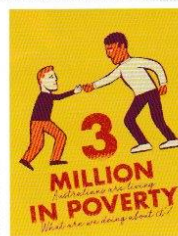
There's yet to be *The Big Issue* in HK, but I am a big fan of *The Big Issue* in Taiwan. I know this is an awesome magazine in many places in the world, too, with topics that really appeal to me. I would like to say thank you again, because I was really glad to read the magazine [Ed#596] and find out that it covered the painful protests in my home city. Thank you for making Hongkongers' demands heard in Australia. And please continue to raise concerns for different groups of souls in need, just like many vendors who are wanting to have a new start of life with their selling job.

Erin Wong, Brisbane, Qld

WRITE & WIN



The winner of next edition's Letter of the Fortnight receives a copy of *Farmer Cookbook*. For a sneak preview, see *Farmer Dan's chocolate cake recipe* on p40. Simply send your thoughts, feedback and stories to submissions@bigissue.org.au.



COVER #598

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN SANDERS/ THE JACKY WINTER GROUP



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» 'Your Say' submissions must be 100 words or less, contain the writer's full name and home address, and may be edited for clarity or space.

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LINE IN THE SAND

Three million Australians are living in poverty, including one in six children. So what does it actually mean to live below the poverty line?

JUANITA AND HER family are struggling. For four months this year, the single mother of three boys – aged 15, 13 and 10 – had to rely on Newstart as her only form of income.

"I ended up being hospitalised because I was so stressed out. I went to my doctor and he was like, 'You're having a stroke'," Juanita explains. "I wasn't, but basically my brain was 'melting', just trying to coordinate all the money that didn't exist, trying to study, doing 20 job applications a month and looking after my kids. I basically hit a wall. I couldn't keep working like that."

Juanita is two subjects away from finishing her Masters, which will greatly improve her income potential – but she doesn't have time to study.

"Do I send my child to their psych appointment or do I pay the telephone bill? These are the kinds of decisions I've literally had to make."

She used to work full-time, but since she's been on her own has had to work mostly short contracts, part-time – the only type of work that allows her the flexibility to care for her three kids. When she is in between jobs, she relies on Newstart.

Juanita's story is not uncommon. It's estimated that about one-third of sole parents and their children live in poverty. The Poverty in Australia report shows that there are now more than three million Australians living below the poverty line, and almost 740,000 of them are children. The poverty line is measured as 50 per cent of the median Australian household income, working out to be \$433 a week for a single person; \$909 for a couple and two kids.

Research by the Productivity Commission found that the percentage of Australians living on very low incomes has not changed in the past 30 or so years, despite decades of economic growth. The report says that "forms of poverty for children in particular have actually risen over the last 20 years".

At the current rate, a single adult living on Newstart alone is receiving less than 40 per cent of the minimum wage and is \$100 a week below the poverty line. For Juanita it means 67 per cent of her income goes on rent, that her family often has to do without. Her two eldest children went to high school this year with only one textbook each. She can't afford extracurricular sport or activities for her boys, and is on payment plans with numerous companies.

"There's just no space for you to actually do the job hunt or get your skills up or be able to maintain your life," she says. "I'm very good with my money. I don't have a whiz-bang lifestyle; I don't have a lifestyle."

She says that she feels stuck, and pretty alone.

"There's no-one giving you back-up," says

Juanita, who is now a spokesperson advocating for Anti-Poverty Week. "You spend your time thinking, *am I making the right decision for the kids or am I ruining their lives? Do I send my child to their psych appointment or do I pay the telephone bill?* These are the kinds of decisions that I've literally had to make. It's exhausting and you just can't get your head above it."

Single parents and their kids are not the only ones struggling. Half of those living below the line are people reliant on payments such as Youth Allowance and Newstart as their main source of income. Nearly 40 per cent have a disability. Almost a third are working. As well as single parent families, people with disability, Indigenous

DATA FROM ACOSS, AIHW AND FOOBANK AUSTRALIA



13.2%

of Australians are living below the poverty line

\$433

the weekly income for a single person living on the poverty line

\$282

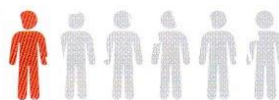
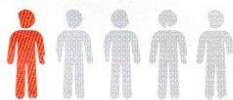
the weekly base rate for a single person on Newstart

1/3

of sole parent families in Australia are living in poverty. 82 per cent of the sole parents are women

1 in 5

Australians have gone hungry in the past 12 months



1 in 6

Australian children are living in poverty

40%

of Australians living below the poverty line have a disability

31%

of Indigenous Australians are living in poverty

Australians and unemployed people are most at risk of entrenched poverty.

The main focus of Anti-Poverty Week this year is raising the rate of Newstart, by \$75 a week, which the organisation says would be "the single most effective way to reduce poverty in Australia".

An Australian Council of Social Service survey of people on Newstart or Youth Allowance found that 84 per cent of the people they interviewed skipped meals to save money. More than half of the respondents said they had less than \$100 a week left to live on after paying for housing costs.

"I only shower about once a week to save on water and electricity costs," said one respondent. "I am no longer purchasing food that requires refrigeration, so that I can turn the fridge off."

When asked what an extra \$75 a week would mean to them, one person said they would be able to keep their car, which would increase their chances of getting work. Another said, simply: "I could feel like a human again."

While poverty rates may be staying stubbornly high here in Australia, they have dropped dramatically in Canada over the last few years. This has been credited in part to an increase in child welfare payments. From 2015 when the increase in payments began, to 2017, approximately 825,000 fewer Canadians are living in poverty.

But Juanita says there is still so much stigma around poverty and receiving government assistance – despite the fact that 70 per cent of Australian households have had one or more person receiving income support at some time.

"There are a lot of people out there who believe this social narrative that we are just bludging off the system. No-one is stuffing their mattresses with money. There is no excess cash," she says with obvious exasperation. "I haven't actually done anything wrong. I've kept looking for work, I'm trying to upskill. I'm raising three boys 100 per cent of the time by myself. I didn't leave. I didn't cause the casualised workforce. I'm working within all of these systems and with all of these circumstances, none of which I have chosen."

She believes the most important thing in reducing stigma and changing the system is the acknowledgement that people living in poverty are still contributing members of society.

"Money isn't the only thing in the world, and people are still doing stuff that's valuable and community oriented," she says. "You know, I'm raising three kick-ass ninja sons who are all feminists. That doesn't have a dollar value."

by **Katherine Smyrk** (@KSmyrk), Deputy Editor
» For more information, visit antipovertyweek.org.au.

Living on the Edge

Poverty is a full-time preoccupation, writes **Anita Glass**.

POVERTY STEALS ALL your time.

Finding food bargains takes forever and I practically live at op shops, collecting towels, blankets and sheets, plus clothes in black and white so they can work together.

The biggest problem is my mindset. The prospect of being short of money terrorises me; I fight back by telling money it's only an illusion. This sometimes removes its fangs.

Living with poverty is an ongoing battle, full of loose ends. If my outfit is acceptable, the shoes need mending. The meal I cooked is missing a vital (costly) ingredient. There is never enough of anything. I hate this...lack.

When everything works for once, life throws another (unbudgeted) curve ball.

I've read dozens of books about how to save

from a payday lender, skimping on self-care, putting off enjoying life until "someday".

Being poor does not have to be a life sentence. I can and will work my way out of it. Besides, I'm not poor, merely broke, which is a temporary state. There, that feels better already. Must remember to pace myself, because poverty is a full-time state of being and one can only fit in only so much before burning out.

To stretch my resources, I do an audit every three months and come up with solutions.

The latest one is to get an (almost) buzz cut at a hairdressing school. Even a student can't get that wrong and I'll save a fortune in hair conditioners. The other is to improve my diet and stop eating cheap cakes. But an avocado is not a luxury; it's health insurance.

The next step is to curate my thoughts and

*"I bungle along as best I can, fighting off fear...
I worry about the future."*

money (anyone for making lipstick out of crayons?). Most are not worth the trouble, but the following three make sense:

1 Pay yourself first, even if it's just \$2 per week.

2 Find ways to make extra money.

3 Buy the occasional luxury, even if you think you can't afford it. My idea of decadence is to have a small latte and read three daily papers that come with it. This is a bargain. It makes you feel less isolated.

To survive I run my own micro business. This helps, but I need something less time-consuming.

My biggest expense is renting a flat that eats up my entire pension. Exchanging it for a cheaper one is no solution if it's far from public transport, shops, food banks and other social services, because then the cost of living rises. Sometimes a solution is worse than the original problem.

My flat (two rooms) is the last word in minimalism. It has a small table, two tiny chairs and two narrow beds.

No TV, no washing machine, no heating. I'll just have to find skinny new friends who'll fit on my chairs. Of course, many people have far less and I am grateful for having made it this far.

I've learned to dodge the poverty traps: borrowing

reframe them. Life is not a tangle of problems; it's an adventure and an opportunity. Look for the copper lining – next time it will be silver.

Pick up the phone and ring your virtual friends, ask how they are doing. Assume they want to hear from you as much as you want to talk to them. Even if it's been 20 years, they are bound to forgive you.

During my daily walk, I see a bird building a nest under the roof of a condemned building, with demolition equipment at the ready. Unable to read the sign on the fence, she blissfully brings yet another twig, another feather. She breaks my heart.

I bungle along as best I can, fighting off fear. My body is not acting its age and has symptoms it has no right to have until I'm over 80. I worry about the future.

Things look especially bleak at 2am. I remember that bird, its nest precariously balanced, and wonder if my walls are about to crash down as well.

Giving up is not an option. I live with a relative who has no income support and needs my help. So I order myself to get a grip, reboot my brain in the morning and start over.

» *Anita Glass is a pseudonym.*

The Long Shadow of Poverty

Almost 740,000 Australian children are living below the poverty line.

As **Sophie Beer** writes, the effects are still felt long into adulthood.

I FIRST DISCOVERED you couldn't be poor and be an artist when I was 11 years old.

My mum was a primary school teacher and recognised how much I loved drawing, so she enrolled me in private art lessons held by another mum at my school. This teacher is forever who comes to mind when I think of "An Artist". Expensive landscape oil paintings lined the timber walls of her Queenslander, her hands were perpetually paint-stained and she always had a paintbrush tucked behind her ear. I loved her. I wanted to be her when I grew up, with her jacaranda-carpeted garden and sprawling art studio that was bigger than the bedroom I shared with my sisters.

Whether my mum could afford my lessons was always an issue; I remember the sheer terror of the countdown until classes began and Mum still hadn't scraped together the money. Poverty is a kind of act of magical conjuring. If there was scant money for food one week, Mum would wave a wand and make a beautiful dinner out of nothing. If there was no money for bills, Mum would reach into her sleeve and make it appear from somewhere. I've never had the guts to ask her how much she sacrificed to become such a deft magician.

Poverty's grip around my family's throat did loosen as my siblings and I grew older but, to this day, I cannot shake its attendant dread from my bones. I hoard money like a dragon jealously guarding treasure. I cannot stand to hear people crying from other rooms: I would wake up in the morning to that sound and it meant my dad had been fired from yet another job and

Mum didn't know how she'd pay the rent without his contribution. I'm so grateful for the most mundane things: a working car, a holiday, a nice meal out. When my partner and I bought our home together, it felt like a cataclysmic shift in my understanding of myself. As a kid, my family was constantly being turfed from rental to rental, no landlord ever wanting to take on a single parent with four kids. I felt guilty every time I walked through the front door to my new house.

I didn't think my art teacher ever treated me differently for being the poor kid, until one final day of term when she called our names and we each had to go up to collect our art projects. She didn't call mine.

A friend yelled out, "What about Sophie?"

My teacher replied, "She never finished paying me, so she's not getting hers." In front of the whole class. I was too embarrassed to even cry. I didn't return to her classes after that.

Years later, Mum told me that my art teacher would spread gossip around the school about how poor my family was. "Poorer than church mice" was the phrase she used. It always stuck with me. What a socially digestible, quaint way of painting the tyranny of financial misery.

I came away from my brush with "An Artist" thinking such a career wasn't possible for me. After school, I wanted to make art, to tell stories, but instead trudged dutifully through a professional degree, paralysed by the thought of letting myself be caught by the gyre of poverty again. *People like you don't make a living out of art*, I told myself. Uni friends were perplexed by this fear. They were, invariably, kids fresh from private schools, buoyed by the serenity of a childhood in ignorance of the due date of their parents' bills. Middle-class kids

who have a safety net to fail become artists. Poor kids, with the spectre of poverty stalking them, ready to grasp them again should they fail, don't.

It took years to work through my fear of being a starving artist. Even now, the fact that I'm paid to do work I'm passionate about is a miracle at which I marvel daily.

In a lot of ways, I was lucky. For starters, my mum was university-educated and it was a given I'd get a degree after high school. I would never have had the guts to aim for a career in the arts if it weren't for my education, which was thanks to my mum. She fought to get me into one of the best high schools in Brisbane, just as she scraped together money for my art lessons. My heart breaks for the kids who aren't as lucky. It's their art of which the world is deprived due to the long shadow of poverty, yet it is also their voices that we need to hear the most. Perhaps such a voice would one day reach another small girl from a struggling family, before she has had a chance to shape what "An Artist" looks like to her. Perhaps she can learn that "An Artist" can look like anyone. It could even look like her.

My mum is still a teacher, now at a tiny country school outside of Brisbane. She is remarried to a wonderful man with a steady job. Their house, which they own, looks like a treehouse, bejewelled with fairy lights and marigolds. She has a vegetable garden and chickens, and a working car. In a few weeks' time, I'm going to visit her class to read them one of my books. Possibly the very first one I illustrated, which I dedicated to her.

» *Sophie Beer (@sophiebeerdraws) is an award-winning illustrator and author living in Brisbane.*

ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIE BEER (SOPHIEBEER.COM)



A WAY OUT

There's a maze of reasons why many Australians experience poverty at some point in their lives. While for many it's temporary, for others it's more persistent. But there are some simple things that really make a difference.

1

EDUCATION SUPPORT

Socio-economic status has more impact on education opportunity than any other factor, says the Mitchell Institute, an education/health policy body. Children who grow up in poverty are likely to be at least one year behind in reading and numeracy by Grade 3.

Low education levels are linked to lower wages and an increased chance of unemployment, which increases the risk of living in poverty. Studies show that finishing Year 12 or equivalent leads to higher annual earnings, greater community involvement and economic benefits for the country as a whole.

With poverty affecting one in six Australian children aged up to 14, many organisations are helping to support kids' education. For example, Embrace Education are assisting students from asylum-seeker, recent migrant and low socioeconomic backgrounds with their schoolwork. University-student volunteers provide free tutoring through Homework Club, in-school tutoring and individual tutoring. They also provide textbooks and school supplies to students in need. Similarly, the Colman Foundation's Our Place program opens schools in disadvantaged areas that double as community centres. As well as normal classrooms, the schools offer health services, adult education classes and employment services. This helps address some of the underlying issues impacting families and brings parents into the school community.

To combat the higher levels of disadvantage faced by regional students, a group of high-school graduates started an online portal called the Regional Education Support Network. Students living in remote parts of Australia can access tutoring, ask questions, have essays proofread and receive advice.

2 RAISE THE RATE

Around a million Australians are reliant on Newstart or Youth Allowance payments, and the Australian Council for Social Service (ACOSS) believes that raising the base rate would do a great deal to help alleviate poverty. The rate of Newstart has not been raised in real terms for 25 years, only adjusted along with changes in the Consumer Price Index.

Research by the University of NSW shows that, combined with Rent Assistance, a single person's Newstart payment "falls \$96 per week short of the minimum required to afford the cost of housing, food, transport and basic healthcare".

ACOSS' proposed change is a "catch-up increase" of \$75 a week for single payments – taking the weekly rate from \$282 to \$357, and the daily rate from about \$40 to \$51. Additionally, many advocates are calling for the rate to be indexed to wages and price increases (as the aged pension is), to ensure that the payment keeps up with cost of living.

3 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

According to the Council of Homeless Persons, for 45 per cent of Australians who are experiencing homelessness, the main cause is a lack of affordable housing. Nationally, a further 1.5 million people are considered at risk, living in housing stress (meaning 30 per cent or more of their gross household income is spent on mortgage or rent). And according to Anglicare Australia's most recent rental affordability study, out of 69,000 rental listings over one sample weekend, *no properties* in any capital city were affordable for a single person on Newstart or Youth Allowance.

The only real solution to this problem is more affordable housing. A "Housing First" policy has been embraced in many locations around the world, whereby people experiencing homelessness are given a permanent home. They then have a stable base from which to seek out other help they might need. This has seen a reduction of long-term homelessness by 35 per cent in Finland, centred around massive government investment in more houses.

4 PRISONER PATHWAYS

A University of Melbourne study showed that the majority of ex-prisoners are unemployed or homeless six months after their release. The results are even worse for those with mental illnesses.

A survey done by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that 44 per cent of people preparing to leave prison planned to sleep in short-term or emergency accommodation, two per cent planned to sleep rough, and eight per cent were unsure where they would sleep.

Organisations like NSW's Community Restorative Centre provide assistance for people transitioning from prison into the community. This includes help with accommodation, employment and counselling.

Sisters Inside is a Brisbane-based organisation that advocates for women in the criminal justice system, but also provides services to help with immediate needs after incarceration. There is health support, sexual assault counselling and mental health support. There is also a Work Pathways Program, which helps women find employment, education or training.

5 A HELPING HAND

Poverty can seem insurmountable, but sometimes all that people need is a chance to break the cycle of disadvantage. The No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) provides a loan of up to \$1500 to low-income people and families for essential items. This can include household items like fridges, medical procedures and education essentials. Repayments are set up at a safe, affordable amount over 12 to 18 months. These loans are issued by local community organisations in more than 600 locations around the country, and operate on the basis of "circular community credit" – which means when a borrower makes a repayment, the funds are then available to someone else in need.

The Good Shepherd Microfinance arm also has a program called LaunchME, which gives aspiring people the chance to develop, fund and launch their own business. Participants receive mentoring, business-plan assistance and a microenterprise loan to help get their business up and running.

6 HEALTH SERVICES

"Where you live, how much you earn, whether you have a disability, and many other factors can affect your health. Generally, the higher a person's socioeconomic position, the better their health," says AIHW in their 2018 Australian health report.

Disadvantaged Australians are twice as likely to have long-term health conditions. A 2019 AIHW study showed that a person's socioeconomic position greatly impacts their chances of developing or dying from diabetes, chronic kidney disease and cardiovascular disease. Those living in disadvantaged parts of the country are twice as likely to die from diabetes factors as those in the wealthiest areas.

The Heart Foundation has started free local walking programs around the country, aimed to improve health and social inclusion – more than half of their participants have a household income below the Australian median. The Big Issue's Community Street Soccer Program has similar aims, holding weekly training sessions across Australia where participants from disadvantaged backgrounds can get fit, make new friends and seek support and advice.

The IDEAS van is a mobile eye health clinic that travels to rural and remote communities in an effort to reduce blindness and visual impairment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with diabetes.

And to help disadvantaged Australians access mental health care, organisations are emerging like MindSpot – a free online assessment and treatment program for anxiety and depression, staffed by AHPRA-registered mental health professionals.

by **Katherine Smyrk**, Deputy Editor