

REDISCOVERING POVERTY – 2013 ANTI POVERTY WEEK STATEMENT



Years ago there were regular references to poverty in our newspapers and other media. It was not unusual for ordinary conversations to make reference to people that were having a tough time. But those days are gone. Nowadays, the word *poverty* appears very rarely. It's as if there are no poor in Australia or that our collective wealth forbids us to speak of them.

However, the poor do exist and ultimately our society is only as rich as the poorest of us. It is this reality that Anti-Poverty Week reminds us of. It is a reminder to those of us that are well off that not everyone has our good fortune.

Often poverty is just that, a matter of good fortune. Being poor and remaining such can simply result from being born into an impoverished family or a marginalised community. Poverty can arise out of unexpected illness or a permanent disability.

If you are aged, a single parent, unemployed or Indigenous the chances are you are either poor or very close to it. This poverty very rarely arises out of laziness or lack of self-care. It often comes about as a result of events or conditions outside of one's control.

Not all poor people are disinterested in work or drunkards. A great number of them work very hard but what they earn is often inadequate to meet life's essential for themselves and their families. A number of them are faced with situations that make them reliant on government benefits that are mostly insufficient for daily living. If you are on the unemployment benefit you will need to find a way to make \$35 a day to pay for your food and bills. We hear regular stories of older people that are unable to pay their bills and often live without heating to avoid having to pay substantial electricity bills. It is more than likely that these same people paid taxes throughout their working lives but receive a pension that leaves them destitute.

A recent report stated that Australians are the wealthiest in the world. Perhaps we are but the number of poor among us continue to increase. We need to rediscover a sense of responsibility for those who are less well-off. Australians need not feel ashamed that the poor are among us. However, we are culpable if we allow injustice to continue. The knowledge that pensioners, single parents and others are doing it very tough needs to speak to our collective conscience and we need to respond. We cannot turn a deaf ear to their calls for help or harden our hearts to stories that are full of pain and shame.

Our leaders have a duty to deal with these issues as we have a duty to demand that every effort is made to ensure that poverty is at the very least minimised. A Prime Minister once promised that no Australian child would live in poverty. Even though the promise was never fulfilled at least it acknowledged that poverty existed and that it was unacceptable. We need to rediscover both the belief and the willingness to do something about poverty.

Tony Pietropiccolo AM
Director