

## Blue Mountains Community – A Snapshot

*Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN), the peak body for the Blue Mountains community sector, pays tribute to the commitment and dedication of many hundreds of paid and volunteer workers in the City of Blue Mountains, who strive every day to make life easier and more enjoyable for someone else.*

In 2012, the Australian Social Inclusion Board released the second edition of its '**How Australia is Faring**' report. This is the principal research report which tracks Australia's progress against a range of social inclusion indicators.

Overall, Australia is doing well on many indicators which are significant to social inclusion. For example, more Australians are completing school; non-school qualification rates are increasing; Australia's long-term unemployment rate is lower than comparable countries; the level of persistent family joblessness has declined; available housing for purchase by low-income groups has increased; and life expectancy is high and increasing.

However, there are still areas of concern. For example, 5% (or around 640,000) of working age Australians continue to experience multiple and entrenched disadvantage; we continue to have the 4th highest rate of children living in jobless families in the OECD; and income **inequality has increased steadily since the mid-1990s**.

The **2014 ACOSS Community Sector Survey** revealed that the lives of people living on low incomes have become increasingly difficult and stressful over the past year:

- ↓ 49% reported quality of life to be 'a lot worse' for people on low incomes (50% for young unemployed people);
- ↓ 49% reported quality of life to be 'a lot worse' for people on low incomes (50% reported 'a lot worse' for unemployed young people);
- ↓ sector staff reported that life is more stressful for: sole parents (56%); young unemployed people (54%); and older unemployed people (52%).

Not surprisingly, the sector identified the **key policy priorities** as:

- \* **Reducing cost of living pressures for people on low incomes;**
- \* **Maintaining State and local government concessions;**
- \* **Increasing income support; and**
- \* **Expanding training programs for people experiencing long-term unemployment.**

The recent ACOSS **Australian Community Sector Survey 2014** cited areas of highest need, as identified by community sector organisations nationally. The community sector overall reported: under-funding (where costs of service provision frequently exceed revenue or staff/volunteers work longer hours); unmet demand, and having to turn people away; and increased service wait times. **Underfunding, and funding uncertainty, are key issues** identified by the sector.

- \* **Across the community sector, services are struggling to meet demand:** overall, **80%** of sector services reported being unable to fully meet demand; and services that prioritise people on low incomes or with specific needs are least able to meet demand.
- \* Services not able to meet demand need to increase capacity substantially **to meet demand:** 33% of services need to increase capacity by 11-25%, but a full quarter (**25%**) **need to increase capacity by 51-200+%**.
- \* 81% say they cannot meet demand for housing services, which they also identified as the area of highest need.
- \* Mental health anguish was second only to housing stress as the area of highest need.
- \* 72% of legal service providers could not meet demand.
- \* 52% of domestic violence and sexual assault services could not keep up with demand.
- \* 45% of services reported emergency relief services as a high area of need.
- \* 46% of youth services could not meet demand.

## The Blue Mountains is home to a diverse community of people.

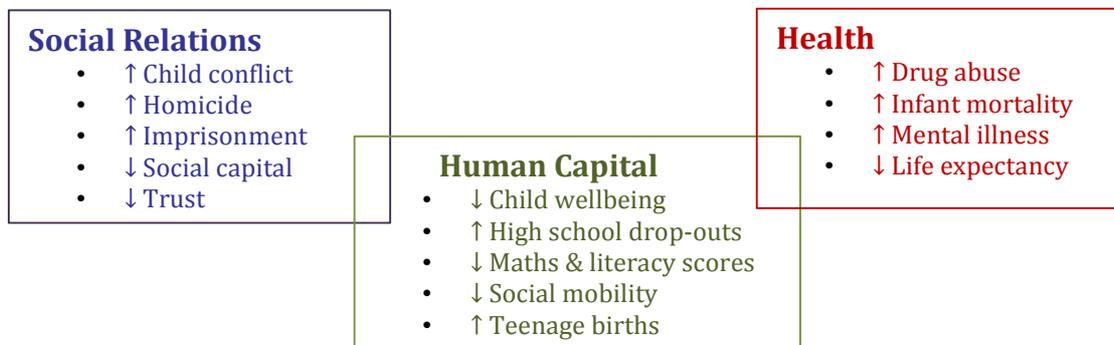
As can be seen from the accompanying Fact Sheets, the most disadvantaged people in our community generally live in the Upper and Mid-Mountains (particularly in the townships of Katoomba, Mount Victoria, Blackheath and Lawson), while the most advantaged tend to live in the lower Mountains (Lapstone-Glenbrook etc.) – though this tends to disguise genuine disadvantage “hidden” in higher socio-economic areas.

We have an increasing number of lone-person, or couple-only, households; and the mix of our population is changing (we are losing our younger population and have a growing older population).

58% of workers leave the Mountains for work, with increasing numbers travelling by private vehicle.

Some of the socio-economic disparity issues are exacerbated by the ‘ribbon development’ (linear geography) of the Mountains; while generally “included” in Greater Western Sydney, the Mountains in fact shares many of the features of rural/regional Australia. The consequent issues of isolation, high travel costs, exacerbated lack of affordable housing, and lack of access to services (many offered only in Parramatta or Penrith) – all combine to create a lack of equity, and place additional burdens on the most disadvantaged in our community.

**Inequality costs** our society, government and the individuals themselves; widening social and economic inequality has internationally well-documented<sup>1</sup> costs such as:



<sup>1</sup> R. Wilkinson & K. Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, Penguin, 2010.

## Community Profile - Summary:



### People

**75,942**

Male	36,711
Female	39,231
Median age	42
Core Activity (requires assistance)	3,391

### Indigenous persons:

 Aboriginal	1,277
 Torres Strait Islander	24
Both Aboriginal & TS Islander	17



### Families

**20,386**

Average children per family	1.9
Blended Families	9,220



### Language spoken at home:

English only	68,602
Other language	3,863



### Unpaid Work

Volunteer for organisation/group	14,288
Assistance to a Person with a Disability	48,885
Childcare	18,854
Domestic work (Female: 5,763)	7,189



### Education – currently attending

Pre-school	1,493
Infants/Primary	6,393
Secondary	5,304
TAFE	2,158
University or other tertiary	3,112
Other type of educational institution	526
[Type of educational institution not stated]	4,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,586</b>



### Households

All private dwellings	33,254
Average people per household	2.5
Median weekly household income	\$1,270
Median monthly mortgage repayments	\$1,842
Median weekly rent	\$280

### Type of Internet Connection:

None	4,441
Broadband	21,228
Other	1,620



### Birthplace:

Australia	59,234
Elsewhere	12,568



### Transport:

Average motor vehicles per dwelling	1.7
Method of travel to work - main mode of transport (2006 Census Data)	

Car	68%
Walking	22%
Trains	3%
Buses	4.5%