The Good Life ...  
a one-day conference

Thinking about the good life
Are we there yet?
Achieving the good life

Thursday 12 February 2009
Queensland Conservatorium
South Bank

Griffith Institute for Social and Behavioural Research
Session One: Thinking about the Good Life

Chair: Professor Ross Homel, Griffith Institute for Social and Behavioural Research, Griffith University

9.10am: Professor Charles Sampford, Institute for Ethics, Governance and Law, Griffith University
Re-conceiving the good life – the key to combating global warming.

9.35am: Mr Richard Eckersley, Australia 21 Ltd
Measuring the good life: long and happy isn’t good enough.

10.00am: Dr Bill Ransome, Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University
Beyond capabilities: wellbeing and virtue.

10.20am: Q&A and audience discussion

Session Two: Are we there yet? Children and Communities

Chair: Professor Paul Mazerolle, Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University

10.50am: Professor John Wiseman, McCaughey Centre, University of Melbourne
Community wellbeing indicators as tools for citizen engagement and priority setting: learning from the experience of ‘Community Indicators Victoria’.

11.10am: Associate Professor Geoffrey Woolcock, Urban Research Program, Griffith University
Is it all sunshine in the Sunshine State? Reflections on the formative stages of ‘Community Indicators Queensland’.

11.30am: Dr Lance Emerson, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
The Good life for children. Do we really care about the trends?

11.50am: Professor Ilan Katz, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales
Modernity’s paradox and the half empty glass: Are Australia’s children losing out on the good life?

12.10pm: Commentary: Adjunct Professor Mike Salvaris, Global Studies, Social Science and Planning, RMIT University
Q&A and audience discussion

~~~ 10.30am Morning tea  ~~~

~~~ 12.30pm Lunch  ~~~
Session Three: Are we there yet? Women, Work and Families  
Chair: Professor Brendan Gleeson, Urban Research Program, Griffith University

1.30pm:  Professor Janet McCalman, Centre for Health and Society, University of Melbourne  
Bad old days and some good new ones: taking stock of the good life in Australia since WW2.

1.50pm:  Professor Glenda Strachan, Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing, Griffith University  
Still working for the man? Women’s employment experiences since 1950.

2.10pm:  Q&A and audience discussion

Session Four: Achieving the Good Life: Reflections from the Academy  
Chair: Professor Richard Johnstone, Socio-Legal Research Centre, Griffith University

2.25pm:  Professor Peter Saunders, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales  
Necessary ingredients of a good life: health, autonomy and engagement - who is missing out?

2.45pm:  Professor Brendan Gleeson and Associate Professor Scott Baum, Urban Research Program, Griffith University  
Joint paper: Space and place: social exclusion in Australia’s suburban heartlands.

3.05pm:  Professor Robyn Jorgensen (Zevenbergen), Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University  
Miracles in the Kimberley: good life and good learning.

3.25pm:  Q&A and audience discussion

~~~ 3.40pm Afternoon tea  ~~~

Session Five: Achieving the Good Life: Reflections from Government  
Chair: Professor Ross Homel, Griffith Institute for Social and Behavioural Research, Griffith University

4.00pm:  Ms Michelle, Patterson, Social Inclusion Unit, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Michelle will provide an overview of the Australian Government’s Social Inclusion Agenda, consider how the concept of social inclusion relates to the philosophy of a good life and reflect on how the ideas and arguments raised in presentations and discussion through the day might contribute to the ongoing development of the agenda.

4.20pm:  Queensland Government Panel, Department of Communities  
Chair: Dr Andrea Lanyon, Strategic Evaluation and Research Branch  
- Ms Janet Benson, Strategic Policy and Evaluation Directorate  
- Dr Susan Brady, Policy Research and Evaluation Branch  
- Ms Judith Rowell, Indigenous Policy and Performance Branch

4.50pm:  
- Conference Overview Panel  
  - Mr Richard Eckersley, Australia 21 Ltd  
  - Professor Janet McCalman, Centre for Health and Society, University of Melbourne  
  - Ms Michelle Patterson, Social Inclusion Unit, Dept. of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
- Q&A and audience discussion

5.15pm:  Conference Close

5.25pm:  Official Launch of the Griffith Institute for Social and Behavioural Research  
Professor Ian O’Connor, Vice-Chancellor, Griffith University

5.30pm:  Cocktail reception and launch celebration
Joint Paper: Scott Baum and Brendan Gleeson

Abstract

Space and place: social exclusion in Australia’s suburban heartlands

As Australia comes off a prolonged period of economic prosperity, attention has now begun to turn to the likely negative impacts across different sectors of society from a severe economic downturn. However, any belief that the previous economic good fortunes were evenly spread across society is difficult to sustain. Not only have social and economic disparities persisted, they have continued to worsen with certain individuals and communities appearing to be particularly vulnerable. Questions of deprivation and social exclusion have therefore been an important ongoing concern and these concerns can be seen as cutting across many layers of society. The individual level is often where neo-liberal policy has been directed. However, space and place are also important, as spatially concentrated disadvantage has impacts across both individual fortunes and the broader social fabric. Taking a specific focus on Australian suburbia, this paper considers the spatial distribution of disadvantage across our major metropolitan regions and considers the impacts and some potential approaches to address the social exclusionary nature of our suburban heartlands.
Richard Eckersley’s work explores issues to do with progress and wellbeing, and whether life is getting better or worse. It includes: measures of progress; the relationships between economic growth, quality of life and ecological sustainability; the social and cultural determinants of health and happiness; visions of the future; and young people and their world. He is a founding director of Australia 21, a non-profit, public-interest, research company established to promote interdisciplinary and cross-institutional networks on important challenges facing Australia this century, and a visiting fellow at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, Canberra. Richard’s work has been brought together in a book, ‘Well & Good: Morality, Meaning and Happiness’ (Text, 2004; 2005). He has also edited and contributed to three other books: ‘The Social Origins of Health and Wellbeing’ [Cambridge, 2001], ‘Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?’ [CSIRO, 1998] and ‘Challenge to Change: Australia in 2020’ [CSIRO, 1995]. He has published over 150 journal papers, book chapters, monographs and specialist magazine articles, has written many articles for leading newspapers and for broadcast on the ABC, and is frequently invited to speak to a wide range of audiences [230 presentations in the past ten years]. He has served on many boards, committees and advisory groups, including the ACT Community Inclusion Board and the board of Families Australia. He is a co-author of a national index of subjective wellbeing, introduced in 2001 and the first of its kind in the world, and of the Australian Wellbeing Manifesto, published in 2005. His work has had a significant influence on a range of national initiatives, including; a national youth suicide prevention strategy; Federal Government ‘green jobs’ programs (LEAP and Green Corps); the Australian Bureau of Statistics report, Measures of Australia’s Progress; and the Australia Institute’s work on a genuine progress indicator and on happiness and wellbeing. Richard’s former positions include: ministerial consultant in two Commonwealth Government portfolios; principal issue analyst in the Office of the Chief Executive of CSIRO; senior analyst with the Australian Commission for the Future; head of the CSIRO Media Liaison Office; and science reporter for The Sydney Morning Herald. He trained as a zoologist (BScHons, ANU) before studying the history, philosophy and sociology of science and technology (MScSoc, UNSW). Before settling into a career, Richard worked as a labourer and professional fisherman, and travelled for two years through Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and Asia.

Abstract
Measuring the good life: long and happy isn’t good enough

The good life, considered in terms of national progress or human development, is generally measured as a long, happy and rich life. In other words, the most common primary indicators are life expectancy, happiness or life satisfaction, and per capita income. Common secondary (explanatory) indicators include: education, equality, democracy, human rights, social stability and individual freedom. A recent global study linked people’s happiness to free choice, and free choice, in turn, to economic development, democratization and social liberalization. Such comparisons place Western liberal democracies such as Australia at the leading edge of progress and development. However, when we look ‘inside’ these societies at their psychosocial dynamics and how these have played out over time, a very different picture emerges. Some, at least, could be societies in decline, in which ‘the good life’ is getting worse, not better. The contrast between the two views could scarcely be more marked. Reconciling them is no simple matter.
Abstract

Miracles in the Kimberley: Good life and good learning

Indigenous students perform poorly in most standard testing currently undertaken by education authorities. The issues of indigeneity are compounded by geolocation so that students in remote areas are even more at risk of poor educational performance than their peers in urban settings. A project is currently being implemented in the Kimberley region where reform pedagogy has been developed based on international research. The pedagogy draws on a number of elements including high expectations of learners; practices that have been found to enhance learning of mathematics; drawing on the home languages and cultures of the learners and rich levels of mathematics. This session discusses data identifying difficulties of implementing reform in remote contexts where most of the teachers are in the early years of their careers.

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Modernity’s paradox and the half empty glass: Are Australia’s children losing out on the good life?

There is increasing concern about the wellbeing of children in Australia and other developed countries. The ‘Paradox of Modernity’ as described by Hertzman and Keating is a feature of our current concern and a focus for academia and policy makers. This asserts that although there have been enormous economic and technical advances in the 20th and 21st Centuries, children are less happy and healthy than they were previously. On the other hand there has been a backlash which accuses these advocates of being ‘wowsers’ and underplaying the advantages which contemporary children benefit from. The real paradox is that it is ‘progressives’ who tend to hark nostalgically back to the past, whereas ‘reactionaries’ proclaim the benefits of the present. The paper explores these paradoxes and the context in which this debate is being played out. I then go on to examine what it really means for childhood to be ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than in previous generations and what evidence there could be for these changes over time.

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Abstract

Bad old days and some good new ones: taking stock of the good life in Australia since WW2

We must always beware inventing “pasts” to justify our conceptions of the present. “Old days” are rarely as good as the maturing memory recalls them; and “new days” can have benefits that are so commonplace that we fail to recognise them. Australia is still not a good place for most Indigenous people, poor people, illiterate or semi-literate people, mentally-ill people, some women, some men, some children and the disabled. But for all those groups, it is better than it was in 1946. Part of that improvement came from developments in the health and para-health professions and their knowledge bases, in changes in ideas about the place of government in society, in changes in public and private social values, but also from changes to the economy and the regulation of labour that brought a larger proportion of the unskilled and disadvantaged poor within the Australian settlement. Under the Howard Government, much of that was lost again, and as we face a global economic crisis that may equal that of the 1930s, we need to look very closely at the sources of security, human dignity and social wellbeing that can be protected and enhanced by government and organised communities.
SPEAKER INFORMATION

Dr Bill Ransome, Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University

Bill Ransome is Director of the Corporate Governance and Social Responsibility Program with the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at Griffith University and research fellow with the Law and Justice Research Centre in the Faculty of Law at the Queensland University of Technology. With publications across moral, legal, political and applied philosophy, his current research focuses on the application of virtue concepts and the virtue ethics approach to a range of important contemporary ethical questions. His recently released monograph Moral Reflection identifies a significant virtue that has so far escaped attention in moral philosophy, and closely examines the stance of three seminal moral thinkers – Socrates, Aristotle and Immanuel Kant – in its light. A keen philosophical interest in the emerging body of empirical research concerning human wellbeing springs in part from an abiding interest the history of philosophical thought about what it means for us to live well.

Abstract
Beyond capabilities: wellbeing and virtue
The capabilities approach to human wellbeing is founded on the ideal of individual freedom. Theories of freedom may be plotted on a continuum ranging from conceptually thin but empirically useful freedom-of-choice and preference-satisfaction views to the ideal of full personal autonomy – roughly, the power to conceive of and pursue one’s own overall ideal of a good life. Yet freedom qua capabilities is not sufficient for wellbeing. In countries like Australia, where individual freedom is well furnished for much of the adult population, this insufficiency is observable in many areas of life: people freely make choices that are bad for themselves, bad for others, and bad for the community. If the capabilities approach is to address these kinds of cases, it must engage with the other side of the equation and consider what it takes for people to conceive of and pursue their autonomous ideals. This paper seeks to open a new discussion about virtues of autonomy and wellbeing in capability-rich societies such as our own.

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Professor Charles Sampford, Institute for Ethics, Governance and Law, Griffith University

Charles Sampford is Director of the Institute for Ethics, Governance and Law (IEGL). Educated at Melbourne and Oxford, he became the Foundation Dean of Law at Griffith University in 1991. In 1994, he was appointed the Foundation Director of the ARC Key Centre Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance. Since October 2004, he has been Foundation Director of the Institute for Ethics, Governance and Law, one of 34 academic elements in the United Nations University that brings together the Key Centre at Griffith, QUT’s Centre for Law and Justice, the ANU’s Centre for International and Public Law and the Center for Asian Integrity in Manila. At the same time he is Convenor of the ARC Governance Research Network and President of an international ethics NGO. Professor Sampford has written over eighty articles and chapters in Australian and foreign journals and collections and has completed twenty one books and edited collections for international publishers. He has held a Senior Visiting Research Fellowship to Oxford and a Senior Fulbright to Harvard. In 2008, he was invited as one of 20 ARC researchers who had most clearly ‘made a difference’ to present his work at Parliament House Canberra.

Abstract
Re-conceiving the good life – the key to combating global warming
Resource-intensive, high-carbon, western lifestyles are frequently criticized as unsustainable and deeply unsatisfying. However, these lifestyles are still attractive to the majority of westerners and to a high proportion of the developing world’s middle classes. This paper argues that global warming cannot be tackled by appeals to asceticism or restraint. There can be no solution to climate change until we can develop sustainable conceptions of the good life that we in the west want to live and which others might want to live.

While the ultimate solution to climate change is the development of low carbon lifestyles, it is important that government initiatives, governance arrangements and economic incentives support rather than undermine that search. Like the global financial crisis, the global warming crisis demonstrates what happens when weaknesses in national, corporate and professional governance are exacerbated by weaknesses in global governance. In tackling the latter, we must avoid some of the mistakes now evidenced in the former – including a rethinking of carbon market and carbon tax alternatives.

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SPEAKER INFORMATION

Professor Peter Saunders, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Peter Saunders was the Director of the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) from February 1987 until July 2007, when he retired from that position and took up a Research Chair in Social Policy within the Centre. His research interests include poverty and income distribution, household needs and living standards, social security reform, comparative social policy and ageing and social protection in China. His recent books include The Ends and Means of Welfare. Coping with Economic and Social Change in Australia (Cambridge University Press, 2002), The Poverty Wars, Reconnecting Research with Reality and (with James Walter) Ideas and Influence. Social Science and Public Policy in Australia (both published by UNSW Press in 2005). He was elected a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia in 1995, and is currently an Australian Professorial Fellow working on the concepts and measurement of poverty and inequality, and on deprivation and social exclusion in Australia. He has worked as a consultant for a range of national and international organisations, including the Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the OECD, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank, the International Social Security Association, and the Royal Commission on Social Policy in New Zealand. He was appointed a Sciential Professor by UNSW in 2006, in recognition of his research contribution and eminence.

Abstract

Necessary ingredients of a good life: health, autonomy and engagement – who is missing out?
This paper draws on recent surveys conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre that have explored what Australians regard as essential items – things that no one should have to go without. It describes the main findings and examines patterns of difference in the views of different groups in the community, but argues that there is a broad consensus about which items are essential. These items are identified and their absence is related to two major forms of disadvantage – deprivation and social exclusion. The incidence of these dimensions of disadvantage is then examined, in total and between socioeconomic groups, and each is related to poverty, defined in terms of low-income. The paper concludes by examining the relationships between deprivation and exclusion and well-being, and discusses the implications of the findings for the measurement of well-being and for the development of social policy.

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Professor Glenda Strachan, Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing, Griffith University

Glenda Strachan is a Professor in the Department of Employment Relations, in the Griffith Business School, and a member of the Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing, Griffith University. She has developed a body of research on contemporary and historical workplace change especially issues that relate to women’s working experiences, and has examined these within organisations, at the level of national policies and an international comparative context. Her work has been published in international and Australian journals including the British Journal of Industrial Relations, Equal Opportunities International and Women in Management Review. She has a PhD from the University of Queensland which was published as Labour of Love: The History of the Nurse’s Association in Queensland 1850 - 1950, (Allen & Unwin, 1996). Prior to becoming an academic she worked with trade unions.

Abstract

Still working for the man? Women’s employment experiences since 1950
For most of the 20th century women’s participation in the paid workforce was determined by ideas of the acceptable role for women in society. Areas of paid work were barred to women, and women’s wages were generally 75 per cent of the male rate for the same job. In the first decade of the 21st century a different mindset operates – anti-discrimination legislation prohibits different remuneration and conditions on the grounds of sex or marital status. Equal opportunity legislation exorts large organisations to advance equity and opportunities for women. Today the male breadwinner model of the 20th century has given way to a dual, or one and a half breadwinner model. In the paid workforce, few women reach the levels of senior management and a gender pay gap of approximately 20 per cent remains. What are the opportunities and choices for women at work today?

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Professor John Wiseman, McCaughy Centre, University of Melbourne

John Wiseman is Director of the McCaughy Centre. VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, Melbourne School of Population Health, University of Melbourne. He also coordinates the Victorian local community wellbeing project Community Indicators Victoria which is hosted by the McCaughy Centre. John has worked in a wide range of public sector, academic and community sector settings. Between 2003 and 2006 he was Professor of Public Policy at Victoria University. Between 2000 and 2003 he was Assistant Director, Policy Development and Research in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. His community sector roles include positions as President of the Victorian Council of Social Service; member of the Public Policy and Education Advisory Committee of Oxfam; Board member of Wesley Mission; Board member of The Tarch Community Cultural Development Project and Moderator for the Cranlana Program of the Myer Foundation. John has published a wide range of books and articles on social justice and public policy issues with a particular focus on the role of local communities and civil society in responding to the challenges and opportunities of globalisation. The major focus of his current research and policy work is on the social, economic environmental and political transformations needed to reduce the risk of dangerous climate change in ways which are just, democratic and sustainable.

Abstract

Community wellbeing indicators as tools for citizen engagement and priority setting: Learning from the experience of ‘Community Indicators Victoria’

The recent upsurge of interest in local community wellbeing indicators in Australia and internationally reflects growing awareness of their potential to focus and support discussions about community wellbeing goals and priorities and to be a springboard for citizen engagement, community planning and deliberative democracy. In Victoria, Australia many local governments and communities have been investing increasing effort in the use of community indicators to support community planning and reporting. While some excellent practice models have been developed, progress has been patchy and limited and the development of link indicator tools with planning and policy making.

Community Indicators Victoria (see www.communityindicators.net.au) has therefore been established as a collaborative project based at the McCaughy Centre, School of Population Health, University of Melbourne to provide a long term base for the development and use of community wellbeing indicators. CIV delivers regular local government level reports on wellbeing and sustainability trends and outcomes as well as providing a focus for improving government and community capacity to develop and use community indicators. This presentation provides an overview of initial learning from the work of CIV including the achievement of agreement on an integrated suite of wellbeing indicators; securing relevant data sets; communicating outcomes and developing policy linkages and capacity. The presentation will conclude with some broader reflections on the policy and research importance of the emerging international community wellbeing indicators ‘movement’.

Associate Professor Geoff Woolcock, Urban Research Program, Griffith University

Geoff Woolcock is an urban sociologist based at Griffith University’s Urban Research Program and is particularly interested in both indicators of social sustainability and the factors that contribute to child- and youth-friendly communities. His work with large-scale public and private sector organisations, including residential property developers and several Queensland and interstate government departments, concentrates on developing measures of communities’ strengths alongside national and international efforts to measure well-being led by the OECD. Geoff is an experienced social researcher with considerable expertise in social and community service planning and evaluation, including social impact assessment and project evaluation. He spent 5 years (2001-2005) as the University of Queensland ‘Boilerhouse’ Community Engagement Centre’s Research Manager, and leading the Centre’s program area, Social Capital and Local Communities, building relationships with over 40 different government and corporate partners, nationally and internationally, to undertake over $2m worth of collaborative, community-focused research projects. Geoff has 18 years community-based research experience nationally and internationally, in housing, youth and health sectors, particularly HIV/AIDS prevention and education, culminating in his PhD thesis on AIDs activism completed in 2000. He also has intellectual and experiential interest in community activism and social reform, especially the evolution of progressive social movements. He was the senior research fellow on the ARC Linkage project, Building Sustainable Social Capital in New Communities, in conjunction with industry partner, Delfin Lend Lease. He is an executive member of the Asia-Pacific Child-Friendly Cities Network, and a Visiting Fellow of the Centre for Urban Research & Learning, Loyola University, Chicago, USA. He has sat on several expert advisory committees, and is currently coordinating the establishment of Community Indicators Queensland (CIQ).

Geoff has been a keynote speaker at several national and international conferences in Ireland, the United Kingdom, South Africa and the USA.

Abstract

Is it all sunshine in the Sunshine State? Reflections on the formative stages of ‘Community Indicators Queensland’

Driven by a rapidly growing international and national agenda addressing measures of progress beyond economic performance, collaborative efforts to establish a state-based system of community well-being indicators in Queensland are well underway. In Queensland, despite a number of local and regional initiatives focusing on measures of community wellbeing, there are still gaps of missing information and little public accessibility of data. Coordination of baseline social and community information between state government agencies (eg Information Queensland; Queensland Spatial Information Council) has been extensive but there remains little overall integration of data derived from other sources. The popularity of the ABS census community profiles offer a very strong basis to develop more dynamic indicators of local community wellbeing and there are a number of state and local government agencies with complementary social data that offer a potentially powerful and engaging public resource. This presentation provides a background and overview of formative influences in the preliminary stages of establishing Community Indicators Queensland (CIQ) including various community well-being initiatives over the past five years that together demonstrate promise for CIQ’s sustainability.
Griffith Institute for Social and Behavioural Research

Vision
To be one of Australia’s leading research institutes in the social and behavioural sciences, with a specific focus on understanding social change and contributing to research-led policies and practices that address contemporary global challenges to achieving individual and community wellbeing.

Mission
The Institute’s Mission is to build depth and scale in Griffith’s social and behavioural research, raising its national and international profile so as to engage effectively with the most pressing problems of our age. The Institute will operate through multidisciplinary research themes and signature research projects, underpinned by high-quality research and administrative infrastructure that improves the productivity of participating research centres and supports multidisciplinary teams of outstanding researchers.

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