

# NOTHING VENTURE NO RED, THING GAINED



PHOTO: MARTIN MISCHKULNIG

*Australia's key social issues require innovative long-term solutions. The real hope for these solutions comes from social entrepreneurs and Social Ventures Australia is pioneering a new approach, bringing social entrepreneurs and business skills together to create sustainable social ventures which can be scaled for greater impact, writes its Executive Director, Jan Owen AM.*

AT FIRST GLANCE they look unremarkable: ten people of various ages and nationalities sitting in a row on the platform in the vast auditorium. It's only when, one by one, they share their stories of heroic acts of humanity and goodness – acts above and beyond the greatest feats most people would dream of achieving – that we realise their greatness.

We are gathered at the Sixth World Forum of Social Entrepreneurs, 700 people, representing 40 countries across six continents, at Oxford University's Said Business School, Europe's fastest-growing business school. The event is hosted by Jeff Skoll, founder of e-bay and, more recently, the Skoll Foundation.

The group on the platform represents just ten of the many stories we will hear of unassuming, visionary people. They have all been driven to act by issues, situations or by social need. They could not sit by and watch without intervening, without trying to solve. They talk about life-saving programs in health, peace-building in war-torn countries and other great humanitarian efforts.

One woman speaks of her frustration in 'only' reaching 100,000 people and creating 16,000 jobs from her simple venture to sell glasses to poor people so that they may maintain a meagre livelihood as tailors and seamstresses, one step removed from living in dire poverty on the streets of Bangladesh.

They speak about the engagement of the recipients or beneficiaries in developing countries in the creation of programs aimed at increasing their economic and life prospects.

In India, the poor are seen as viable customers and entrepreneurs with the ability to solve their own problems if given the means and opportunity. In fact, many of the high-impact social programs and essential services in India, Africa and Bangladesh would have neither the financial resources nor the reach required unless the beneficiaries were committed to their delivery.

These ten people have replaced cynicism and despair with hope, optimism, energy and love.

The key social issues we face in Australia today are indeed the same issues as those identified in other developed countries as requiring innovative long-term solutions. Despite an aggressive reform agenda by the Federal Government, sustained economic growth and a demonstrable increase in individual wealth, there remains a deep apprehension that we have not done as much as could have with the opportunities and resources available to us.

As a society we have not sought to address our social need collectively but rather we have relied on governments. If they can't or

won't do it, then we rely on charities to pick up the pieces. However, despite the best intentions of government and charitable intervention, Australia is beset with a persistent and intractable set of social issues, affecting identifiable groups of people within our community, that cry out for innovative solutions.

While the Australian Government provides a social safety net for its most vulnerable citizens, the bureaucratic and risk-averse nature of its support means some populations inevitably slip through the cracks. Nimble, innovative, grass-roots organisations, led by passionate social entrepreneurs who live with these challenges everyday, are often better able to fill the need gaps that government simply isn't structured to address. SVA focuses its resources on where the government falls short by building the capacity and effectiveness of these innovative non-profit ventures, enabling them to demonstrate impact and eventually to access government or other private-source funding.



*'One woman speaks of her frustration in "only" reaching 100,000 people...'*

The key issues are universal in nature: the disconnection and fragmentation of our young people who do not access education and the passport to opportunity which this provides; the ageing of the world and the shifting demographics; the environmental crisis; the economic and social inclusion of those who live on the margins of our societies because of poverty, disability and abuse; the indigenous peoples of the world living in poverty of opportunity and spirit.

As Charles Leadbeater, former advisor to Tony Blair and author of *The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur*, states, 'Social Entrepreneurs address social needs left unmet by the state

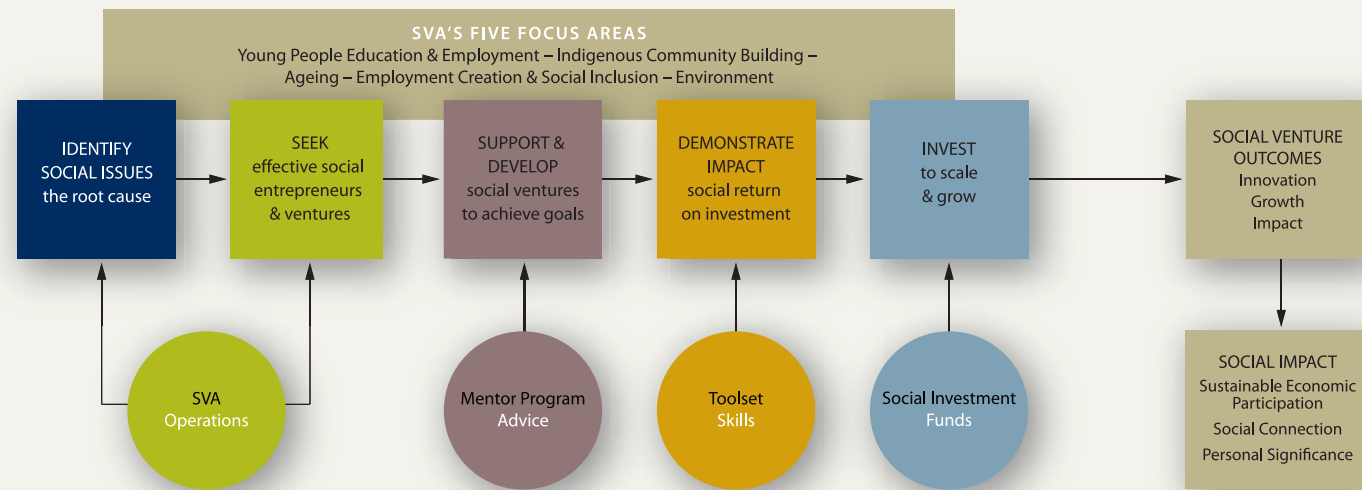
or the market. Where the state is too cumbersome to respond or the market cannot see a profit, then social entrepreneurs are often the only hope of innovative solutions to pressing social needs.'

SVA represents this new approach to addressing some of our intractable social problems bringing social entrepreneurs and business skills together to create sustainable social ventures which can be scaled for greater impact.

SVA has carefully considered the organisation's areas of focus, the unique context within Australia, and the conditions under which these issues exist. New solutions not only require assessing and selecting the most relevant ventures to support but a longer-term strategy to leverage the individual efforts of social entrepreneurs in order to maximize their impact.

SVA is addressing the social needs we have identified according to the following criteria:

INNOVATION – identifying social entrepreneurs who are piloting,



### A new model of philanthropy

SVA's process of identifying and supporting innovative non-profit ventures helps to boost their sustainability and impact.

or have proven, new ways to address social problems;  
**REAL CHANGE** – a capacity to scale or replicate the solution and create or influence systemic change in the area;  
**SYMPHONY** – the ability to reach across established boundaries, sectors and fields of business, government and not-for-profit activity to form partnerships of skills and knowledge transfer to increase the impact;  
**LONG-TERM INVESTMENT** – in both financial and capability terms – five-year commitments alongside multiple strategies aimed at sustainability of the social ventures and their programs;  
**ACCOUNTABILITY** – the ability to report and articulate a social return to investors, stakeholders and the wider public.

The following is an outline of SVA areas of focus and some brief descriptions of just a few of the ventures we support in each area.

## YOUNG PEOPLE – EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

IN SOME PARTS of Australian society, up to 42% of young people still do not finish secondary school. This is often a reflection of an education system which is inaccessible and a society that appears to undervalue the teachers who spend their lives educating our children. The lifeline on which the futures of families, communities and countries depend is the education of children. Education means escape from poverty, a livelihood, choices, opportunities and a future.

At SVA, we support early intervention and prevention programs which encourage young people to complete school and explore career pathways for future employment. Our ventures also work with young people who have dropped out of school, are disconnected from their family and community and who have experienced abuse and neglect.

*Hands on Learning* is a design and building program which is part of the school curriculum to encourage 12 – 15 year old young people who are truanting to return to school. This program not only builds

### YOUNG PEOPLE – EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

#### The Challenge:

- Nearly 30% of young people who left school in 2006 are not in full-time study or work
- 42% of young people leaving state / foster care are unemployed one year later
- In the average Year 12 classroom:
  - seven young people will have experienced a recognised mental disorder
  - only two of them will have sought professional health
  - one will have attempted suicide
- Young people aged 12 to 24 make up an estimated 36% of all homeless people in Australia

PHOTO: PATHWAYS FOUNDATION

exceptional facilities for the school but works with young people in designing and building suburban-renewal programs.

*Pathways Foundation* provides a rite of passage from child to adulthood for young men and women and their parents. This program addresses the absence of a formal transition to adulthood in western society that often results in young people failing to take responsibility for their actions as young adults and future parents.

## INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY BUILDING

AUSTRALIA'S indigenous people are still suffering from a lack of economic opportunity, full participation and the benefits of living in a country which enjoys unbridled wealth and opportunity.

SVA has had the privilege of working with people like Adrian Appo, CEO of *Gambina*, an organisation which supports families to choose education for their children and then pursue careers beyond those which have been previously available to them.

*Beyond Empathy* uses the arts – through storytelling, belly casting and female elders – to provide pre-natal education and support for young pregnant indigenous women who would not otherwise access mainstream health services.

## AGEING

AGEING LOOMS as a significant crisis to our children's children unless we begin to address this issue now. From 2040, there may not be sufficient people in the coming generations to care for the current one. Economic prosperity, health and technological advances equate to longer life for this and subsequent generations. The burden on the aged-care system is predicted to be significant and the provision of care services within the community will be critical to ensure a healthy, productive and happy older age. Predicted labour shortages threaten the provision of these services and pose a real threat to the care of the ageing for coming generations.

SVA is investing in long-term community solutions and alternatives to institutionalisation for the aged. The *Homeshare* program connects older people who wish to stay in their own homes with younger people, often students, in need of accommodation. This seemingly unlikely partnership provides essential security and basic care for the independent older person, ensures they remain happily connected to their community and delays the need and cost of entry into an aged care facility.

## EMPLOYMENT CREATION & SOCIAL INCLUSION

IT IS SAID that the measure of a society is found in how it treats its most vulnerable. Inclusion of those who live on the margins of our community because of disability, mental illness, poverty, or loss of homeland has not been our strong suit in Australia. It seems the positive affects of economic growth and prosperity mean their needs have become more visible, yet support by charity alone is insufficient, inadequate and sometimes inappropriate. Our challenge as a community is to create life-building opportunities by providing resources and skills enabling people to participate in the economy and make a meaningful contribution.

This is best achieved through social enterprises where real change occurs because they create 'win-win' environments. SVA's work in developing and building social enterprises – real businesses with a social purpose and not-for-profit structure – is specifically designed to create employment opportunities, and a real sense of contribu-

*'SVA's pioneering model of engaged philanthropy helps connect the "haves" with the "have nots" to build a stronger and fairer Australian society. We back innovative ideas and passionate entrepreneurs to address the root causes of exclusion.'*

### INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY BUILDING

#### The Challenge:

- The retention rate of indigenous students from year 7/8 to year 12 is 40%, almost half that of non-indigenous students (77%)
- Unemployment is in excess of 80% across indigenous communities
- Suicide rates are three times that of non-indigenous rates
- Males die 17 years and females 19 years earlier than non-indigenous Australians

*'Australia's indigenous people are still suffering from a lack of economic opportunity, full participation and the benefits of living in a country which enjoys unbridled wealth and opportunity.'*

### AGEING

#### The Challenge:

- Australia's population aged over 65 is set to grow from 12.4% in 2000-01 to over 21.3% by 2031
- In 2005, over 200,000 Australians have Alzhiemers. By 2050 it is expected to be 730,000
- There are 5.4 people for every person over 65 in Australia. By 2044, this number will fall to less than 2.4 unless the labour force participation rates increase for older people

*'Predicted labour shortages threaten the provision of (care) services and pose a real threat to the care of the ageing for coming generations.'*



PHOTO: WWW.LORRIE GRAHAM.COM

## EMPLOYMENT CREATION & SOCIAL INCLUSION

### The Challenge:

- 700,000 Australians are considered long-term unemployed
- Over 70% of people with a mental illness do not have opportunities to undertake meaningful/life enhancing work
- Over 2.4 million Australians, including 743,000 children, live below the poverty line

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Challenge:

- CO2 levels have risen 30% in the last 150 years but are forecasted to double by the end of the century
- In 2005, Australia experienced its worst drought on record
- Australia's ecological footprint (land required to sustain a lifestyle) is an average 7.7 ha per person, compared to 1.6 ha, which is the global average required for sustainability

tion and meaning as part of the wider community, for those previously excluded from the mainstream labour market.

Social Entrepreneurs like Peter Cox, of *Future Employment Opportunities*, view under-utilised people and utilities as our greatest community assets. He has established five social enterprises to train and support people into work. His recycling yard, part of the Eaglehawk tip, not only employs 15 previously long-term unemployed men but delivers an environmental bonus by saving on further landfills.

## ENVIRONMENT

THE ENVIRONMENTAL crisis is well documented and we are compelled to act both locally and globally, individually and organisationally if we are to stem the tide of an environmental catastrophe. In Australia the reduction of our ecological footprint, the protection of our eco systems and forests and the use of alternative sources of energy must become a way of life. In this area we also have much to learn from Indigenous Australians and their connection to, and care of, their lands. SVA's work in this area has focused on individual, community and organizational environmental education programs. OzGREEN has established Australia's first 'Living Communities' program helping businesses to take control of their use of energy, waste recycling and to making a commitment to decrease their impact on the planet.

AS I SAT at the Skoll World Forum listening to the presentations, I had a strong sense that around the globe a sea change has begun and power and influence is slowly being devolved (or taken!) from institutions to individuals, from governments to the people. SVA, and other organisations in Australia, are already supporting some of these people – social entrepreneurs who have created solutions to the world's social and environmental problems.

Despite our fears, our hesitations and our procrastination, an invitation has been issued. The opportunity for Australia to become a global leader in social change and engagement beckons. We have the accident of birth, the wealth, the optimism, the openness, the scale and the capacity. It is going to take our collective energy, intellect and focus to address our current and future social need. SVA invites you to join us at the table of hope, optimism, energy and love. ○



PHOTO: PHILIP RITCHIE