This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan History Project for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Mr Andrew Hall. The topic today is [the Department for] Community Welfare in the 1970s. Andrew started there in 1974 as a social planner and moved through the organisation in various roles. The date today is 2nd July 2008 and the location is the Don Dunstan Foundation.

Andrew, thanks very much for being happy to do this interview for us. Could you just talk a bit about yourself and how then your education and your employment flowed through to the Department for Community Welfare?

Thank you, George. I’d left school at about fourteen and went to work in a family nursery business. I completed my matric at night and I went to then the University of South Australia\(^1\) to the Social Work School. I finished there and worked briefly for the Department of Social Security in their Special Projects Division looking specifically at the Australian Assistance Plan, which was a major development under the Whitlam Government under Marie Coleman’s Social Welfare Commission. I didn’t particularly want to stay with the Commonwealth. Through my training, part of which was done with Maori Affairs in New Zealand, I was particularly interested in community organisation, community participation and community development generally, and that’s why I did the placement with Maori Affairs because they were one of the few statutory welfare organisations that had a community orientation.

I must say when I graduated one of the last agencies that I wanted to work with was the State welfare department. Being an idealistic student I was interested in community empowerment as opposed to social control, which inevitably welfare departments are; but I’d heard Ian Cox speak in New Zealand on the changes that were happening in South Australia. He was there at a request of the New Zealand Government to consult on juvenile justice legislation and the like.

And Ian was head of the Department.

\(^1\) Then the South Australian Institute of Technology.
He was head of the Department then. I was just so impressed with what he was trying to do within the framework of a statutory welfare agency. They were the halcyon days, I had three job offers in the one week, and I chose the Social Planning Unit because I thought there was more potential for me to participate in the development of social policy and the like.

**Can you recollect what Ian’s main ideas were?**

His major ideas were involvement of the community, that we couldn’t just impose changes within families, within communities, from above; that we had to involve them; that we had to change our culture in treating juvenile offenders, that the greatest determinant of re-offending was participation in the juvenile justice system, so the deeper you got into juvenile justice the more likely you were to become a recidivist. And just, yes, his general notions of community involvement and community participation in welfare services.

**And did he talk about how he was doing this in the Department?**

He only gave scant reference. The Community Councils for Social Development were only just starting up at that stage: They were enabled under the *Community Welfare Act* of ’72 and were just starting up; but it was so new to have a community body directly contributing to the work of a State Government department, and I found that particularly appealing.

**You mentioned you’d worked in the Social Security Commonwealth Department on AAP² stuff, so how did those AAP and Councils for Community Development interact?**

Well, the Community Councils for Social Development actually preceded the AAP Regional Councils for Social Development. The State was concerned there that the Commonwealth was putting in a lot of money, it was putting in two dollars *per capita* into those regions for the allocation of grants and we had already established smaller units in the Community Councils. There was an agreement between I think

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² AAP – Australian Assistance Plan.
it was Len King and Bill Hayden, the Social Security Minister, that the Community Councils would form the bottom tier, if you like, of the community involvement structure and representatives from those Community Councils would constitute or be a major part of the Regional Councils for Social Development. So we tried to link in both the Commonwealth program, AAP, and what was happening at the State.

I think it’s fair to say that a lot of the community ‘activists’ weren’t particularly keen on this sort of model: They saw it as institutionalisation rather than true community democracy and community participation; but realistically the Councils had to be linked or something had to be done, because you couldn’t have two bodies with very similar objectives out there trying to do the same sort of thing.

**And was there any conflict?**

There wasn’t – yes, there was certainly conflict at an agency political level; it didn’t really extend down to a community level, those sorts of arguments went over the head, I think, of a lot of community participants; but certainly the ‘activists’ were very concerned that it was a limiting thing.

**We’ll come back to those councils and what they achieved later on. Can you recollect just at the time what the broader social or the community was like and then how that was reacting to what Don Dunstan was talking about?**

I think it’s fair to say, leading up to the time of both the Whitlam Government federally and the [Dunstan] State Government, that I and a lot of other people of our generation were just caught up in the whole fever that the world could be changed and that we could have a more positive society, a more equitable society, that we could do serious things about reducing, if not abolishing, poverty. There was a lot of idealism.

**The Henderson Inquiry was on at some stage.**

The Henderson Poverty Commission. That went through well into the ’70s. It ran for a long time because it had a lot of demonstration projects and a lot of research projects operating at a local level. I remember there was an important one with
George Martin in the Hindmarsh area. But, yes, that ran for a long time and it would have been mid–late ’70s before it reported.

I see, right, yes. Did a lot of papers, from my recollection.

Enormous number, enormous number.

Lot of research.

Yes.

And what had you known or heard about Don Dunstan and how he fitted into any of this?

I came from a very conservative family background where Dunstan was not a hero. But I’d, through reading and before I went to university, become interested in social change issues and Dunstan did just so many things when he came in. I don’t mean, the superficial ones like changing drinking hours and things like that; but a lot of the very conservative strictures in society were being taken away. There was also what I perceived as a genuine interest in changing the worker’s role within society generally: He brought in the Industrial Democracy Unit well ahead of its time with attempts to democratise the workplace; the workers’ compensation scheme was introduced – major reform, relative to the other states, as I recall. So they were some of the things that influenced me, the general approach of Dunstan and his government towards social change as opposed to status quo politics.

Yes, so you saw that as a good environment to take up a position in the Department as Social Planner?

Yes. Well, there was some optimism that you could actually do something.

So what was a Social Planner expected to do?

We were a new unit, we were one of the first units like this established. It was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the states to develop social policy capability within each of the state welfare departments. Western Australia had a very strong unit that ran for some time. A number of the others petered out after the Commonwealth seeding funding was withdrawn. South Australia, from my
recolletion, was the only state that picked up the funding of the whole unit after the Commonwealth withdrew.

The Unit was responsible for developing new program ideas; developing operational guidelines for new services that might come in; assisting with the Community Welfare Grants Fund, which was quite a small fund at the time but we assisted in reviewing some major grant applications and the like. A significant role in the early stages was a contribution to physical planning, physical development – so, for example, I sat on the Residential Land Use Committee, which was looking at ways in which we could better design medium-density housing, all work that, quite frankly, was well ahead of its time.

Interesting.

Considering medium-density housing developments over the last decade, this work was well ahead of its time. But we even did things like consulting on the introduction of new doors –

New doors?

– in buses, how single-parent families or a mother with a child could handle these new doors; consultations on new urban developments or redevelopments. The Unit was also involved towards the end with the establishment of the Rehousing Committee, I think it was called. That was established in response to the outcry over the Hackney Redevelopment proposal.

That was Leo O’Reilly – – –.

Yes, Leo O’Reilly, he was on that committee. I thought it had amazing objectives in that, where compulsory acquisitions of homes were envisaged, their job was to help the family find another comparable place that met their needs – their social needs and human needs, not just could they afford it – and if there was a gap between what their property was worth and what the social equivalent was for them, then the Government made up that difference, which was groundbreaking at the time. But there was a lot of work in new urban developments, what were the minimum social services that you should have.
We also liaised [with] – but it was coming to an end – the Monarto Development Commission, I can’t remember their names, their social planning unit, where they were looking at co-located if not integrated human service delivery with welfare centres near or adjacent to schools with health centres in the same proximity. So we did do quite a lot of work on the social planning for urban development.

And does the term ‘social mix’ mean anything to you?

Oh, yes. (laughter) Yes. There were endless debates over coarse-grain and fine-grain mix. We also had a major project called the Social Indicators Program – I in fact was responsible for that. It was an attempt to collect a lot of data that was already collected by government agencies and to bring it together and to try and use some of it to identify social needs or at least priorities for funding or for services. We collected an enormous variety of data that had never been brought together in one place – things like final readings from ETSA, to give you an idea of household turnover in an area: that social data had never, ever been used before. Unfortunately, like a lot of those planning initiatives, it was scrapped as budget constraints came in down the track and yes, unfortunately it was scrapped.

And what was the social mix discussion about?

Well, whether we pepper-potted people with welfare problems all over the place or whether you had them in small clusters or whether you had areas that you said were of a different socioeconomic mix. I mean the arguments ranged from, if people are all in the one locality they have a cultural similarity and are able to interact and work together for their mutual benefit because there wasn’t a lot of social distance – I mean, a medical specialist doesn’t relate to a single mum on welfare benefits – or did you put pockets in suburbs so you might have a small area of people of a similar socioeconomic status within a lager area and so achieve heterogeneity over the whole suburb. There were arguments about whether you had little clusters of

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3 ETSA – Electricity Trust of South Australia.
welfare recipients through to the fine mix of having a welfare mum in every street, so to speak. They were the sorts of arguments.

Was that just for government developments or a combination of government and private?

This was mainly for government thinking, particularly in relation to the Housing Trust. Leo, if he’s still around, would give you a much better idea. The Trust did a lot of work in buying up existing houses and putting families into them rather than the broad scale, broad acre development.

Yes, the new stuff, yes. Interesting. And was that the first of these sort of debates? It was pretty new.

Well, it certainly was for me, and I think it would be fair to say it was some of the first because participants from Housing Trust and from Health, *et cetera*, all found it very, very difficult to come to grips with – nobody had ever thought of social engineering on that scale. Suburbs were as they were developed and there was no hand to guide or shape them.

And can you remember where this came from? Like who thought of it? Was it just something coming through the academic research?

I was interested from an academic point of view. It was a major issue for the Housing Trust, shaping their policy. As I recall, most of our involvement was at the request of the Housing Trust to debate these sorts of issues. It was also stimulated by the work of academics like Hugh Stretton at Adelaide University. But where a lot of it went, I really can’t remember.

Yes. I remember the name Richard Nies was one of the people who knew about this.

Yes.

And how did you react to working in DCW to in this environment? Were there a lot of old people, young people?

The Department was going through the throes of a major, major change. In the old Social Welfare Department there were very few professional staff involved, they were mainly people who’d been through in-service training. Ian Cox, when he became Director-General, was very concerned to professionalise the Department: He thought there was great value in people being able to have a policy or contextual view, an understanding of what they were trying to achieve, that if they had broader professional skills that would give them mobility to move from different areas so that people just didn’t get trapped in one division or one branch of the Department. When that happens people can develop very rigid and definite views about how clients should behave. There was certainly a sense of the ‘old guard’, given that the new Community Welfare department brought together the Social Welfare Department and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs; a lot of people that came in from Aboriginal Affairs deeply resented the amalgamation – I think it’s fair to say that they were marginalised or certainly de-powered in a lot of ways. Some went on to be managers in country locations, assistant director in the case of southern country and northern country regions, but a lot of them found it very difficult to come into this new department with a lot of ideas that were totally foreign.

I think you have to recall that, under the Social Welfare Act – which didn’t really go out until ’72 – social workers were required to visit every single mother. Hospitals advised the Department of new single mothers and we went out to check on them. That practice had gone but the social control mentality still lingered with a lot of the old workforce. There were new, young professionals coming into leadership positions and I think it’s fair to say that a lot of people struggled with that sort of change. Some of the people like Brian Ward, Peter Bicknell was another significant one, they were young professionals who came in with distinctly different ideas about the delivery of welfare services and what justified intervention in families’ lives, just a totally different approach.

Gee, that’s interesting. And you were talking to me the other day about Don Dunstan’s views about the work people from Aboriginal Affairs did –

Yes.
– for the Aboriginal people –

Yes.

– and how he wanted that changed. Can you talk about that?

I wasn’t particularly involved in Aboriginal affairs at that time; I was much more involved later on.

Right. Well, we’ll talk about it right through.

Yes, but just briefly, the State Government had taken over the Aboriginal reserves from the church agencies and were managing them. Dunstan wanted the Aboriginal community involved in decision-making and managing their own communities. I think it was fair to say he was frustrated with the rate of change and set a date, which Aboriginal Affairs staff said was too soon and too precipitate, for the Department to get out of communities, and as a result a lot of Welfare Department staff were pulled out very, very hastily. I know in some cases records were just destroyed in the haste to get out on time and meet the Premier’s requirement. In hindsight, I think, whilst I agree with everything Dunstan was trying to achieve there, the move was too fast. At least under the Department things operated – the generators worked, housing was generally a bit better-maintained and things like that.

To give you an example, many years later I was over at Koonibba on the West Coast. The Department there had bitumised a whole hillside as a water collection apron and that supplied a lot of the settlement’s water. When I was there, weeds were just growing through it and, as you know, when weeds start to get through bitumen it soon breaks up, and that water catchment would be totally lost within a short period of time because the community just didn’t really understand the importance of maintaining, going up in there and pulling the weeds and tamping it down. So the major thing the Welfare Department can claim to have done there was to make sure things worked. After they left, a lot of things didn’t work as well, the physical infrastructure didn’t work as well.
What I’m trying to unscramble is the responsibility went to the Commonwealth in the early ’70s –

Yes.

– so what was their role, the Commonwealth – or initially there was the amalgamation in the State Department –

Yes.

– but then things went to the Commonwealth. But what was the Community Welfare’s role? Then it was more to do with if there were social work-type problems.

Yes. I can’t really tell you much of what the Commonwealth – I wasn’t particularly involved. What the change did mean, that the Commonwealth made available to the states a lot of funding for Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal community workers, within the Department –

I see, yes.

– and from memory there was funding of about twenty-two positions within the Department to provide Aboriginal staff out in district offices. That was a mixed blessing, in that it brought on very quickly a number of Aboriginal people, many of whom today are the Aboriginal leaders.

Yes. Can you remember names?

Do I remember names?

Yes.

Matt Rigney, Rob Agius, David Rathman: they’re some of the key ones perhaps because they’ve gone on. But a number of those people who came into the Welfare Department – Sandra Saunders, Sandra Vandenberg [whose] maiden name was Miller from the West Coast, they came in and went on to be in some ways the mainstay of Aboriginal leadership within South Australia.

The down side for Aboriginal people of this funding was that it enabled the State to say, ‘Funding of Aboriginal programs is a Commonwealth responsibility’, and so it took a long time for the State to actually put its own resources into Aboriginal
programs. So later on, as Director of Aboriginal Welfare, I found it very hard to get resources out of the Department for new Aboriginal programs because we maintained the Commonwealth is responsible for providing the funding. I was told, ‘you go to the Commonwealth to get the funding’; the Commonwealth said, ‘No, Aboriginal people are citizens of the State, they deserve the same sort of resources as anybody else – in fact more so, because of their significant disadvantage’. And so whilst we could get that initial burst of twenty-two-odd Aboriginal workers in the Department it took me nearly two years to double the number of Aboriginal staff within the Department.

What years were these?

This was coming up into the early ’80s, but it resulted from those changes in the mid–late ’70s, this attitude that the Commonwealth must fund all Aboriginal programs.

Interesting. And if they did fund some of them, did they direct what happened to the money or did they just hand it over?

No, it was project or program-specific, all of it.

Right, so you had to account for it.

Yes.

Interesting. Now, you mentioned the Community Councils in the regions.

Yes.

You had the AAP, but that sort of disappeared after a while.

Yes.

But DCW highly ‘districtised’, I’ll call it, and regionalised.

Yes.

What was happening around all those?

One of the things of the Community Welfare Act of ’72 was to provide for Community Welfare Centres to be established around the State. This was a
significant decentralisation of our services. Prior to this, we had an office at Port Augusta and one at Port Adelaide, and the Welfare Office in the old Cox Foy’s Building in Rundle Street. So the sort of decentralisation that occurred was revolutionary in some respects. Cox often referred to decentralisation as enabling services to be tailored more closely to the local community – I mean, the community at Noarlunga is very different, say, from the community at Bowden–Brompton, and service delivery should reflect those sorts of differences. Localisation enabled us to recruit more volunteers and get more volunteers involved in providing support-type services to families; it enabled us to interact with other local service providers – local government, other agencies that operated at that level –

NGOs, yes.

– yes – to get their co-operation or some sort of integration/coordination with what they were doing. So they were the major thrusts of decentralisation. There were also some inefficiencies. It was pointless having a pool of cars in Adelaide and sending somebody down to Marion if you could have an office there. I don’t know how the economics would actually measure up today if you evaluated it, but it was seen as a big advantage of decentralisation.

And that happened very quickly. The first Community Welfare Centre was built out at Campbelltown. Bill Hayden and Len King had actually signed an agreement that we would consult with the Commonwealth and co-locate with Commonwealth Social Security and the first office we built was nowhere near (laughs) where Social Security wanted to be and they were very pissed off with that. The ink was hardly dry on the agreement and we announced the Community Welfare Centre in the Minister’s own electorate. (laughs)

Totally coincidental.

(laughter) Totally coincidental. I think it was only within a couple of years there were seventeen offices set up, moving to twenty-three. Before it all started to implode with cost-cutting. All up I think they were something like twenty-seven
branches – offices and branches – within the State. Now, this was a major change relative to other State agencies that were all very, very heavily centralised.

I don’t know whether you want to get into deinstitutionalisation?

**We’ll come to that one in a minute.**

Sure.

**I’ll just follow the decentralisation line a bit.**

Yes.

**So were decision-making powers also decentralised?**

There were some decisions handed down to officers. They weren’t major delegations. When they set up the new regions, if you like, the four metro regions and two country regions, based on that – there was a committee on regionalisation that looked at common regional boundaries.

**CURB.**

Yes, CURB.

**Committee on Uniform Regional Boundaries.**

That’s correct.

**I was on that.**

Were you?

**I confess.**

(laughter) Well, it was an exercise we had to do and it’s just a pity that after it was all set up it started to be more honoured in the breach than the observance. But certainly we took the four metro regions and amalgamated the country into two regions, and that’s when there was significant decentralisation of decision-making. Regional directors had delegated powers for the removal of children, *et cetera*, that previously had been retained in Central Office, if not in the Minister’s office. So they delegated out to regional directors a whole raft of decisions that previously had been totally Central Office, as I say, if not ministerial decisions. That was a major
change and it did lead to local services and local operations being more community-specific than they had prior to.

This also brought about problems of its own nature in that people then stepped back and said, ‘How can it be just to have this sort of thing happen in this region and a different thing happen in a different region’. It’s an insoluble argument, but it was a very, very serious attempt to decentralise decisions. I was one of the first replacements for the original regional directors and, yes, the exercise of those responsibilities I found particularly onerous: like whether you decide to proceed with the removal of a child or lock up them up on a safekeeping order, for example. They were very onerous decisions and it was good, I think, that they were delegated out to the regions because local staff could then question their regional director more closely about why the decision went one way or the other. It wasn’t that you sent it into the Black Hole of Central Office and wisdom came out; they were much more involved in what happened, and I think in a lot of cases we had much, much better decisions. Fewer children were removed.

Cox was very, very keen that we only intervened where it was absolutely necessary. He was fanatical about bringing down stats of kids coming into care, kids being locked up. You know his background was in institutions in Victoria and he hated them. He wanted to see the greatest number of kids kept out of institutions, not locked up for relatively minor offences. What were Juvenile Aid Panels originally and later Children’s Aid Panels were a major way of diverting kids out of the formal juvenile justice system. The centre, without actually having to make the decisions, with a small group of regional directors, could keep reasonable policy comparability in the exercise of those powers. So when we started to look at keeping kids out of the system you only had to influence six regional directors, not a whole lot of district officers or have it controlled by one or two people in Central Office. So we could get down the figures, and the figures did drop, with that sort of concerted approach.

Was this reviewed at times or just let run?
I can’t really say that it was reviewed, because lower figures were good figures and that was the end of the analysis, I think.

**Dennis Ryan told me he was on a committee from the Premier’s Department in looking at Community Development Councils.**

Yes.

**So, from your recollection, where did that come from and what did it lead to in DCW?**

(laughs) What brought the issue into focus was the Commonwealth’s withdrawal of funding for the Regional Councils for Social Development. The Central Western Region was the main demonstration region in South Australia and I think there was something happened in – there was a similar sort of thing in Northern Country, although I was never as closely involved. I was very closely involved with the Central Western Council however. They were getting an annual grant of about half a million dollars to distribute to projects, and of course with the Commonwealth withdrawing there was a big hue and cry about what was going to replace it, was the State Government going to pick up the funding. And I was personally involved in a little incident which brought the whole thing unstuck. I was asked to produce projections about what funds were needed for the Central Western Region.

**If the State picked it up?**

Yes, what the State would actually pick up. And of course there was the request, ‘Well, of course, the State Government only wants to pick up the lowest amount’. Financial strictures were already starting to happen so the State couldn’t pick it all up: ‘What figure do you think it could be?’ I didn’t know each of these projects, but I had a very good working relationship with the then person in charge of the Central Western Region and he gave me the Council’s working notes from their last budget round, which included projections on what they thought was needed in the next year. A lot of them were, ‘This is the third year of funding; it should be able to survive’. ‘This is the second year of funding; it should be half what it was previously.’ ‘This one doesn’t work, so we won’t fund that.’ So I must confess I took the recommendations of the Regional Council as a reasonable guide as to what
sort of money would be needed. Unfortunately, when that list got to the Premier he saw it as the Commonwealth cutting funding to those projects, because it was considerably less. What we were proposing the State should pick up was considerably less than the half-million the Commonwealth had provided, and he picked it up and was incensed that the Commonwealth was withdrawing this money and went on I think it was This day tonight with Clive –

Clive Hale, yes.

– Clive Hale, and unfortunately Clive understood the document far better than Dunstan did –

Oh, really.

– and accordingly said, ‘But these are your own officer’s recommendations, Premier’, and Dunstan went berserk. Well, not berserk, but he was very angry and he was angry for perhaps not being prepared for this particular interview as well. And that crisis brought in a view that we should look at what on earth we’re doing as a State policy here. Are we going to continue and replicate these Regional Councils for Social Development? – because we were then starting to see embryonic ones develop in the other regions. What is the role of community councils versus the role of local government? – a subject had never been clearly worked through. I think it’s fair to say, certainly to my Minister at the time, there was a lot of scepticism about what local government could do. Jim Hullick was with the [South Australian Local Government] Association and of course he held very strong views about what he called ‘community government’ and the role of local government in the provision of services. My Minister just didn’t trust local government, he viewed them as property value organisations. And so this committee came into being to look at what community councils should do.

Okay. The funding issue was dealt with reasonably easily. Some funds were transferred from the Community Welfare grants. Oh, one of the functions of Community Councils for Social Development was to advise the Department on the allocation of its own grants program, and a lot of those didn’t go just to traditional
welfare services but went to what would be considered preventive or social development services that would, arguably, prevent social problems in the longer term. So a considerable portion of Community Welfare Grants money was hived off to local government to distribute, to strengthen local government’s role in this sort of work. And I must say it only took local government about three or four years before that money was eroded away in cost cutting and other budget reductions.

Over the same time, the old Community Welfare Grants scheme, by the transfer of moneys from within the Department but also with new moneys allocated by Cabinet, built back up that Welfare Grants fund to what it had been previously. The committee continued Community Councils for Social Development but gave local government a much stronger role. I think, if I remember correctly, John Bannon became the minister responsible for local government at the time and he was very keen to have local government more involved.

That was the late ’70s, yes.

Yes.

And I was on the Thebarton Council when it started in the early ’80s and they certainly had a Council for Social Development, so something must have continued there.

Yes.

But I imagine not every council did it.

No. I think through the efforts of some of the NGOs, the church agencies in particular, that council was much more active in social issues than, say, Tea Tree Gully, for example.

That’s interesting. And you mentioned earlier on deinstitutionalisation. You referred to that a bit.

Yes.

What did you want to talk about there?

Well, it was a major thrust I think of the Government but also of Cox personally. He told me many stories about abuses within institutions that he’d observed or
known about in Victoria and abuses he had known about here. I think it was actually one of Dennis Ryan’s phrases that he put into a policy paper, that ‘Even the most average family is infinitely preferable to the finest institution’.

Very good, yes.

We all sort of scoffed at the ‘treacle’ of the phrase, (laughter) if you like, and we all thought it would get knocked out because it was just a bit too simplistic. But no, if anything it was underlined. Cox took it as a flag and Dennis’s reputation (laughter) grew as a result. But it’s what Coxie thought. Prior to that there were orphanages, the Department had a lot of group homes, you know, small residential care facilities, and then of course there were the major institutions like the old Magill Reformatory or later McNally Reformatory, that had many, many kids in. I think Bill Cossey chaired the committee that reviewed deinstitutionalisation within the Welfare Department, and their projections – if I remember correctly – were that, had the Department not deinstitutionalised, and given the population increase and the population profile changes that were occurring, instead of having something like about one hundred and fifty to two hundred kids in residential facilities, we would have had seven hundred.

Really?

So it was a major, major change. I mean it was a decade to a decade and half ahead of, say, Health’s attempts at deinstitutionalisation and certainly well ahead of anything else in Australia. Nobody attempted to do that. And as a result we developed a lot of family-based programs, like Intensive Neighbourhood Care, which was in the view of other states totally revolutionary: that you’d take a kid who would normally go into a reform institution and actually place him/her out with a family. And whilst the value of the money paid to them has eroded with inflation over time, at the time they were much more generous payments, particularly in relation to foster care, which has always been a pittance. They were getting funds, they were getting some reward for the effort they put into those kids, and with a
groundbreaking decision with the Tax Office, those funds were not considered as income, that was a major achievement for us.

**Gee, it sounds very interesting.**

So yes, I think that was one of the things Cox was absolutely a driving force for, and I must say that his minister at the time, Ron Payne, was an absolute marvel of support.

**Really?**

And they weren’t very happy years of his life, so he could always argue with great conviction in Cabinet for the extra resources. ‘Look, I know what it’s like’, and no other minister could actually sit back and say, ‘Well, Ron, this is ridiculous’. And so he was a major driving force, too, for those sorts of things. So Coxie and Payne came together to great effect, I think.

**Did you get any sense of Ron having his ideas, or was he mainly responding to Ian?**

He responded to a lot of the program ideas of the Department. The major advantage was that he was committed to the objective, he wasn’t going to be put off, and I know he pushed Cox on the development of a lot of things, particularly winding up or encouraging the NGOs to wind up their orphanages and the like.

**And the churches, I suppose.**

Yes.

**Interesting. And just talking about ministers, Len King, did you get any sense of he was influencing things?**

I came in just at the very end of his [period]. Glen Broomhill was my first Minister. I met Len King when I was in New Zealand, he was doing a study tour of New Zealand looking at particularly Maori affairs and I’d been working in Auckland with what were called ‘J Teams’ at the time – they were ‘J’ for ‘Joint’ – that was a Maori police officer, a Maori welfare officer and a Maori from a non-government agency, and he was particularly interested in that. They were specifically set up to work with Polynesian gangs and Maori gangs and he went there to learn about them. We
had about a half-day seminar with him going over the work of J Teams. I gained
the impression that he was an intellectual but also the driving force with what was
happening within the Department at that time. As I say, I wasn’t in the Department
at that stage.

Interesting. So just looking back on it, was there any other – sorry, before we get
into the looking back – was there any other areas that you would like to talk about
that we haven’t covered?

I was particularly involved with, if you remember Andrew Bishop, the development
of the State Welfare Disaster Plan.

Oh, yes.

And then – and this was towards the very end of Dunstan’s premiership – that Ron
Payne ordered a review of the *Community Welfare Act*, and we started that and had
well and truly completed it. It was on Ron’s desk when he moved out and Roy
Abbott came in as Minister.

Right, yes.

He wasn’t as committed to it at that time, this is going into the ’80s. Then, in what I
thought was a stunning piece of ministerial management, when the good doctor’s
government came in –

Tonkin?

– Tonkin’s Government came in and we had the MLC\(^5\) – I forget his name, (John
Burdett) he was a good Minister – and they came in with a lot of ideas about where
they’d like welfare to go. And at one of the first briefings Coxie brought the
*Community Welfare Act* and said, ‘It’s all been done, Minister. Here it is’. And to
our delight he took up – – –.

Was that Griffin?

No. He’s since died. He was from Murray Bridge.

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\(^5\) MLC – Member of the Legislative Council.
No.

I can’t.

**We’ll track him down there.**

I can’t.

**Track down that name.**

But I mean I thought it was just stunning, it was a stunning piece of *Yes, Minister* work, you know, that ‘It’s all been done, Minister’. And that contained things – community councils were at that stage to be handed over to local government and so we argued for consumer forums to get feedback from the community and there were a lot of other changes in the child protection area.

I think it’s fair to say that during Dunstan’s time a lot of the major advances were in the area of juvenile justice, youth policy or youth services, and that was because Coxie came from that and he understood it intimately. He didn’t understand child protection quite so well, and so I don’t think – when Sue Vardon became Director-General, she actually reversed that. She didn’t understand juvenile justice, but she understood child protection and she put her efforts into there.

I think another major thing about Aboriginal affairs, certainly during the latter part of Dunstan’s premiership and the Department, was that the power – and I don’t know exactly where it came from – but there was a total desire not to have a central focal point for Aboriginal affairs within State Government. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs was a much later development. Whether it was Cox or Busbridge[?] or Bruff I’m not sure, but there was a very strong desire to keep Aboriginal services within the mainstream of the Department, not to have a separate focal point which they argued would inevitably lead to separate services. And once you have separate services they can be hived off into another department.

I think it’s also fair to say that Cox didn’t understand where Aboriginal affairs were going. In New Zealand I’d been impressed with what Maori Affairs were doing in terms of developing a positive multi-cultural identity and a cultural strength and pride, and I saw that as the future for Aboriginal welfare – I mean, it’s still yet
to be achieved, but that’s I think still where we need to go, so that they’re positive enough and strong enough to manage their own services and the like. But he didn’t really understand – I don’t think in his heart he really understood that sort of direction; it was more education, more services, et cetera, rather than building a positive identity through the development of cultural activities, things that enabled Aboriginal people to be proud of their heritage rather than as second-class citizens into the future.

I get the sense that Don certainly had this interest, commitment, followed through where he could, like the APY Lands, the land rights up there, that there doesn’t seem to have been a high-level policy setting that the sort of thing you’re talking – well, the land rights certainly was part of that, like pride and ownership, notwithstanding it was community ownership, joint ownership – the sort of things you’re talking about now that was then set to flow through, whatever the State was doing.

Yes, yes.

And to me there seemed still some – probably even now – but confusion between ‘Well, the Commonwealth’s got it, they ought to be handling it’ and ‘What’s our role?’

Yes.

And it’s mainly a straight sort of service role in our jurisdictions.

Yes. For me, at a more operational level, what I had seen in New Zealand, that their whole focus with kids at risk was to get them involved in carving schools or traditional-dance, the Maori language, those sorts of things, he had no interest. He said, ‘What on earth are they learning to carve for? They can never earn a living or get a job with those sorts of skills’, which was true; but that’s the way they were going – they used carving and crafts and dance to develop this belief in their culture. He saw it as irrelevant, what saw as important was to help people get educated, to get jobs, to learn how to bring up families and the like.

Was there anything more you wanted to say, just reflecting on the Dunstan decade and the Department?
Yes. The overall thing was that, like all things, you don’t realise how good it was until it’s gone. Certainly my time in Social Planning – I appreciated it at the time, but also subsequently – one of the most of the exciting times, because you could do things, you could develop new ideas, develop new programs and get funding for those. The Social Planning Unit developed ideas like the Crisis Care Unit, Budget Advice Service, the Homemaker Service, all of which had a much stronger preventive role than what the Department was doing hitherto. It was exciting that you could actually have an idea and write it up, develop the policy and then Cox would sell it to the Minister and then you took it from there; that things could actually change. And we were recognised as innovators; visitors from interstate and overseas came to look at what we were doing. These days it’s about what savings you can achieve, (laughter) rather than what you can actually develop.

**And ‘What are all the risks?’ type stuff.**

Yes. So it was, on reflection, an extraordinarily exciting time to be involved in social policy, because you believed you had, in the Premier himself and in the Government generally, a desire for social change, and working in a social agency it was great.

Yes. And you were how old then, in your twenties?

Yes, in my twenties.

**And you felt as though, notwithstanding your relatively young age, you were given a lot of scope to just get on with things.**

Yes. A lot of scope, a lot of encouragement to come up with new ideas. Coxie would drop in when we were having a cup of coffee and just continue, ‘I want new ideas, I want new things to put up. I haven’t heard anything from you guys for weeks; what on earth are you doing?’ Which sometimes led to policy on the run, but yes, there was a sense that you could do it. Coxie, on the other hand, jealously guarded his relationship with the Minister: the only way to get to the Minister was through Cox, and it took a long time for that culture to break down where more junior staff actually briefed the Minister directly. But that’s old Westminster
attitudes, and certainly Ian Cox (laughs) managed it very well. But, even so, if you’d prepared a briefing paper for the Minister and it went up, you always got feedback directly from Cox, whether he and/or the Minister liked or disliked it; you were never, ever left in doubt – things just didn’t disappear into a Black Hole. You always got good feedback, you know, if the Minister didn’t like it, from Cox, ‘Rewrite it, I don’t like it’, whatever. But always we had a direct working relationship to him despite Andrew Duguid, because for him we were, with Dennis and some of the other people, not to be too egotistical about it, a group of young Turks, if you like, and he liked getting new ideas and new things.

Can you recall any clangers that were made, with the experimentation and whatever else?

I forget what it was now. It was a response to a major Commonwealth report – this is my major clanger – and, having been not long out of university, I still had a very academic style of writing and so I wrote extensive comments – I mean it must have been up to fifty, sixty pages of comments – on this report. But buggered if I can remember what it was about. And it came back – and it took ages to do – and it came back from Coxie saying – it was a submission to a committee – ‘We will not be making a submission to the committee. If you look at paragraphs one, page blah-blah you will see how not to write a government report’. (laughter) I mean, I thought it was a wonderful piece of work, I’d worked night and day on this, but it was a big clanger for me. But yes, it was good, because I learnt that communicating your message is just as important as the content, and I hadn’t communicated it. (laughs)

Yes – got the intro set. Just while you were talking, the Children’s Commission came to mind from the Commonwealth.

Yes.

Did they have any interaction with DCW?

Well, certainly at Coxie’s level. He was offered the chairmanship of that. Well, I’m not sure whether it was –
So it was Marie Coleman’s – – –.

– yes, Marie Coleman was Chair of the Social Welfare Commission. I’m not sure what stage the offer got to, but he certainly was very, very keen to take it up, and then it was abolished along with a lot of the cost-cutting after the end of Whitlam. But Coxie was a major contributor to that, both at a departmental level but at also a personal level. He knew all the players on Social Welfare Commission and on the – I think they had, from memory, they set up an interim or a temporary [body] to start with – but he knew all those players and so he was always on the phone to those people and when he was interstate bending their ear about different things, and he certainly saw it as a major way to improve things for kids and was, I mean, quite heartbroken when it folded up because, yes, he was really passionate about it.

And it also reminded me one other thing that I think was a major contribution of Cox: that he was spectacularly successful at getting money out of the Commonwealth. Years later I had Commonwealth officers say to me, ‘How did he get all that money?’ You know, when they’d review things: ‘He’s got more money than all the other states combined. How does he do it?’ And it was mainly because he was talking the same language and he was just very skilled at grantsmanship, basically. He always managed to get on to the right people and if there was a blockage he’d go above them. But he was spectacularly successful in getting resources for welfare programs into South Australia. The Aboriginal Child Care Agency, for example, there was one operating in Victoria and we funded the second one here in South Australia, and he managed to get joint funding for that from the Commonwealth. We couldn’t have found all the money ourselves to set it up, but he got the money for that. For the Homemaker Program, he got money for that. He was just (laughs) very good at getting the resources. Yes, very skilled.

Okay. Well, thanks very much, Andrew. That’s been great.

My pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW.