Speech delivered by Adam Graycar:

"Non-Government welfare organisations"

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Well, as I have to have a stab at Cinderella, we can imagine a situation of "in the left hand corner, ladies and gentlemen is purity, nicety, honesty and delicacy, sweetly and delightfully getting on with the job, always doing the right thing, but alas, always being hopelessly misunderstood, getting no thanks for anything and perpetually being starved and mistreated". Sound familiar? "And in the right hand corner, ladies and gentlemen, growing bigger and fatter are the ugliest nasties you have ever seen - they think they know where it's all at, and they think they're there. But they're pretty sure of themselves and try to hide their self doubts. They do fight against each other - pull each other's hair and cause each other distress, but to divert attention from the fact that they're growing fatter and uglier they make sure poor old Cinderella knows her place so they give her a good solid thump every now and then - quite regardless of whether she's doing her job well - but just to make sure she knows her place".
Is that how the Cinderella story goes - I think I'd rather be talking about Robin Hood, or Alf Garnett, but the programme promises you Cinderella. As Cinderella is about stereotypes and dichotomies I want to talk about the stereotypes as they relate to where we're heading - and in terms of where we're heading, touch, within the context, on questions of goals, responsibility and resources in social welfare.

Where we're heading, I contend, is towards some form of centrally planned change. Whether voluntary agencies want it or not, whether voluntary agencies like it or not, more comprehensive, and more authoritative planning is the name of the game, and, I would suggest, the agencies are in a position to have a fairly solid input to centrally planned change. If the agencies don't take up the challenge government will proceed regardless, so the ball really is in the agencies' court.

By centrally planned change we mean public efforts that are broad in scope, deal with the entire community, and assign control and authority over resources to certain public structures to achieve the stated goals. We're talking here about a developmental process with redistributive effects. Who, we must ask, is to select the goals, formulate relevant policies and plan for and affect the means of implementation? Who is to evaluate this process and point out the strengths and weaknesses? To leave it all to government is a grave error of judgement, I would contend. I see a very important role for voluntary agencies in this sphere, and this has important ramifications for our fairy tale as the tale perpetuates the dichotomy between voluntary agencies and government as a dichotomy comparable to that between sober judgement and reckless abandon. Like in fairy stories there might be considerable pleasure or gratification for some people to think in these terms, but like a fairy tale this dichotomy is sheer nonsense.
There is no doubt that an important dichotomy does exist and it is most important in today's situation though it is difficult at times to separate fact from fantasy. The dichotomous situation relates to the roles of our actors and the objectives they set, and the resources (as well as the will) that they have to pursue their goals.

Philosophically and historically voluntary agencies have their origins in charitable activities - the extension of a helping hand to the less fortunate in our society. The valuable work done by many charitable organizations was invariably well intentioned, but quite erratic, highly discriminating and limited very much by the agencies' members' energies, social schedules, and moral imperatives. The situation, not very long ago was that voluntary agencies dealt only with the deserving poor. Over time many charities grew into social work agencies and we find most in that category today, blending a reasonably sensitive appreciation of their neck of the woods with some sort of professional expertise - and, with the aid of privately raised finance and government contributions, having the resources to deliver services. Government, on the other hand, is quite a newcomer in the service delivery business, and one of the main arguments in the industry is about whether government should be there at all. Without wanting to get sidetracked, let's go back to the emerging dichotomy.

Government has a clear constituency, a reasonably well understood sense of responsibility and accountability, and sufficient resources to undertake the jobs it chooses to perform for the community.

Voluntary agencies, on the other hand, do not have any clear constituency, nor sense of accountability. They choose their constituency and range of accountability themselves and do pretty well as they please with their resources.
The dichotomy that emerges is that government can appear to be able to concentrate on social planning and policy development in a forward looking way while voluntary agencies must focus on service delivery only, and in a fragmented and limited manner. The logical extension of this sort of thinking is that government, because of its authority and resources can dictate to the field, set directions, specify goals, mount campaigns, and deploy resources as it sees fit. And, as it obviously cannot do all the things that voluntary agencies have been doing for some considerable time it can throw a few crumbs to the agencies to try to keep them onside, but really do little more than tolerate them. The agencies, in response wail loud and clear and feel sorry for themselves continually muttering that government simply doesn't understand. This, at the moment looks more like reality than fairy tale - so let's look at some of the realities of the situation.

That government must be intimately involved in welfare cannot be disputed at all. In all forms of economic life government has become the big underwriter. Large corporations cannot survive without comprehensive economic planning and industry would be in more chaos than it is in today without any government taxing, spending, subsidizing, guaranteeing, organizing, assisting, regulating, and generally assuring the flow of national income. There are regulatory bodies set up by government to look at transport, communication, agriculture and just about everything else - it would be hard to argue that the same should not apply in welfare.

Government's potency as intervener and underwriter derives from the complexity of the modern economy and the social and economic consequences of an industrial society.

Many people in voluntary agencies lament this broad role that government has carved out. Very often the lament is based on a Cinderella versus the ugly Sisters syndrome - believing that Cinderella is being pushed back into the kitchen - this isn't quite so - she's never been out of it.
I'd like to continue the discussion of centrally planned change in terms of some comments made by Professor Ray Brown who listed three major deficiencies in our attempts at broad-scale planning and administration.

First, there is an absence of proper provision, particularly at government level, for gathering, assimilating and preparing the information upon which policy decisions can be based. This is one of the major impediments to good planning, and while certain organizations are revamping their information policies we've got a long way to go.

Second, Professor Brown pointed to the failure to give adequate attention to the means of involving people, groups and organizations in decision making about matters of social concern, and particularly in participation in developing the policies that affect their lives. Certainly moves have recently been made in this sphere, but again we have a long way to go. Through our research on the A.A.P. and the Community Councils we've identified weaknesses in both programmes.

Third, there is a lack of any publicly acknowledged formula for administering the complex federal, state and local systems of welfare. This problem is not ours alone - but is shared with all comparable political systems.

Inroads into these problems require imaginative thought and actions. Voluntary agencies have a major role to play, but most important, only in concordance with government.

Voluntary welfare organizations basically are groups of private citizens organized to provide a service that derives from the groups' interests or values, they're funded in the initial stages through voluntary contributions and they have no legal responsibility for general community welfare and no responsibility to continue the organizations' activities, nor are they responsible nor accountable to anyone in particular. Various cases
have been made for accountability to donors, government, the community, and clients. A major American study in the late 1960s listed several factors as unfavourable to the survival of voluntary agencies.

In short, their findings were that there is a great deal of fragmentation among agencies and this tends to isolate agencies from the mainstream of community problems. There are too many specialized agencies which are too small to be effective other than in a very narrow focus. The volunteer is being pushed aside by the professional and is becoming very much a spectator rather than an actor. One major criticism was that voluntary agencies have not responded often enough to their opportunity to identify weak spots in our social welfare system and advance proposals for action.

This may be the case in the U.S.A. but I can see this area - that of identifying weak spots and planning co-ordinated action as the major thrust of organized voluntary agencies. This will be their contribution to centrally planned change. In fact, survival of voluntary agencies is not the big issue. Cinderella will still be with it, but will she be barefoot out in the kitchen picking up crumbs, or will she be right up with the big ugly sisters, thus making sure she gets part of the action?

Well, what sort of action are we thinking of? As I've said, centrally planned change is the orientation to which I believe we're heading, and there are two steps in the argument. First, we must establish that centrally planned change is a worthwhile strategy and in doing so we must consider the alternatives. Second, if we accept that centrally planned change is where we're heading, we find that to ensure democratic equity and operational credibility, government and the agencies need each other, and this immediately raises another discussion point in the argument - that of time and scope in planning.

Institute of Community Studies: Voluntarism and Human Welfare, N.Y., United Funds and Councils of America, 1968.
Those who argue about centrally planned change usually put up two alternatives for the conduct of our welfare system. Working from the belief that centrally planned change is a horrific 1984 nightmare the alternatives repudiate centralism.

One alternative argues that market mechanisms are far more efficient in delivering public services than are centralized bureaucracies. People like the economist Milton Friedmann and the management theorist Peter Drucker are strong proponents of the view the market mechanism, i.e. - giving clients the ability to purchase services in the market - their bargaining position is enhanced along with their ability to secure services. The counter argument is that welfare services are not consumer commodities that can be bought and sold in a market situation. The market mechanism argument is popular among many elected officials who want to see a quantifiable and efficient return on expenditure dollars. In the province of Ontario in Canada, for example, the government is contracting out to large corporations to provide packaged services. Should the market mechanism argument gain greater currency here in Australia, and a contractual system is developed (and of course anything can happen), then the proper bodies to handle contracts are not private profit making corporations, but forward looking non-statutory welfare agencies.

Another alternative to centrally planned change comes out of the belief that welfare consumers should not only have their rights and interests recognized, but should play an active part in any form of planned social change. The argument is that under a system of central planning this is not possible - minority views have no real currency as it is argued that public services are controlled by majority interests in society. This argument develops a system of local community control as an alternative to C.P.C. I think there's a great deal to be said for local community control, but on its own it only makes small inroads on minority powerlessness. Carrying decentralized control to its logical conclusion must lead to fragmented
policy. Decentralized control may be excellent for service delivery but I firmly believe that those who deliver the services as well as those who receive them must have a substantial input to the policy making realms. Whichever approach one takes, one is talking about three things, scope, method and style, and under each of these headings there are ranges of activity.

The first issue, that of scope, relates to the role of government in society - and this has been hotly debated since Aristotle and the rate of change, mostly incremental has been accelerating recently.

The second issue, that of method, is about intervention. It's about the who and how of intervention - how funds are to be spent - who is to deliver services - all done by government? All done by voluntary agencies? A contracting out system? Free market? System change or whatever.

The third, style, is more than a method. It is a blend of philosophy and action, ranging along a continuum of virtual non-planning to extreme bureaucratic control.

Scope, method, and style must be discussed in terms of the system and in terms of the various actors.

I certainly haven't done justice to the centrally planned change argument but if we accept its potential viability then let's turn to our second dichotomy - that of scope and time.

Government has the scope to deal in broad ranging issues that agencies on their own, cannot deal with. But agencies have the time. Governments can do their thing, would you believe come and go without knowing when the next election will be. This blend of scope and time is a firm basis for bringing together the two main sets of operators - the two main commanders of resources - matching governments' financial resources with the agencies' personnel resources and experience.
The future of the voluntary agencies has been discussed ably by David Scott of ACOSS and Colin Benjamin of VKCOSS. I don't want to go through their arguments today. What I want to say is that the voluntary sector's voice ought to be heard at every level of government planning and policy making - not as a sectoral view, but rather as a community view. How is this to be achieved?

The answer lies in political tactics. Welfare is a political activity and one must never forget this. You might remember the doctors' recent campaign with the slogan "health and politics don't mix". Nothing could be further from the truth - and the same goes for welfare. Welfare and politics do mix.

Co-ordinated activity by those who don't speak with a booming voice, by those too small to be seen to matter, by those just getting on with the job, is the key to purposive social action for the community.

Organizations like SACOSS - the umbrella body for South Australia's agencies and consumers have an undeniable responsibility to play both an innovative and watchdog role in the process of planned social change.

SACOSS and its members must help government rectify the deficiencies outlined by Professor Brown, which I mentioned earlier. It must ensure that information upon which policy decisions are made is gathered and prepared in such a way as to have maximum impact. Information is power, and good research will provide information, which is a basic political resource.

Second, SACOSS and the agencies must ensure that welfare consumers and the traditionally powerless in our society are able to realize their rightful political potential. In order to ensure that government claims about participation in planning are not just window dressing, there is an important community development role to be played.
In the policy and administrative areas SACOSS and the voluntary sector must ensure that its voice is heard - that its view is available for consideration on policy and delivery issues, that SACOSS act as a channel to government for the presentation of views in more than a token manner. To leave all matters of administration and policy making to government is a dangerous thing and could easily turn centrally planned change, which I generally support, into a 1984 nightmare.

Unless government is doing a perfect job, SACOSS is being negligent in its duty if it is not a thorn in government's side. I am not, however, talking about conflict for conflict's sake, but about equity in social welfare.

It's the job of SACOSS to make the voluntary sector act with its proper strength, to enhance its capabilities, and to make sure that the glass slipper is worn properly and that Cinderella can get to the Ball in all her splendour, right up there with the big sisters.

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