

# How can charity be reimaged to contribute towards a more just society?

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What do we  
mean by  
'charity'?

- Charity has many meanings (legal, political, spiritual, etc)
- We define it as *the voluntary giving of money, resources, or time to non-kin or non-friends*
- Focused on 'bottom-up' responses to poverty
- Don't included contracted welfare services provided by NGOs

# Charity's growing prominence

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- Charity increasingly prominent in societal responses to poverty
- Growth in food charities in developed countries (incl UK, US, Japan & Australia), even Finland<sup>1</sup>
- Growing reliance on charity by people in poverty<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Feeding America (2014); Kimura (2018); Lambie-Mumford (2017); Lambie-Mumford & Silvestro, (2020); McKay & Lindberg (2019)

<sup>2</sup> Parsell, Clarke, & Perales (2021).



# Homelessness charity boom

- Also boom in bottom-up homelessness charities<sup>3</sup>
- Largely ameliorative
- Providing basic amenities to people on the street

<sup>3</sup> Parsell & Watts (2017)



## Consulting & Scaling Impact

44,500+

GUESTS SERVED BY OUR AFFILIATES

94,000+

SHOWERS PROVIDED BY OUR AFFILIATES

57+

ORGANIZATIONS IMPACTED

40+

NEW PROGRAMS LAUNCHED

61+

CITIES REACHED

5+

COUNTRIES REACHED

# LavaMae<sup>x</sup>

“We provide 1:1 program consulting, free and fee-based in-depth training, do-it-yourself toolkits”



## Barmy Brexit Party candidate says wheelie-bin bed can solve Britain's homeless problem

Peter Dawe says his 'sleep pod' will keep rough sleepers dry at night but admits his 'genius' idea of putting the homeless in rubbish bins has horrified some people.

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By Tom Bevan  
18:29, 5 FEB 2020



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## *Innovation* on Stilts

- Sleepsuits
- Backpack beds
- Conversions



# Intuitive & morally appealing?

- The right to a shower (LavaMae<sup>x</sup>)
- Dignity (Orange Sky)
- Observable deprivation
- Demonstrable impacts of deprivation: poor hygiene and poor nutrition contribute to poor health

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## Not just fringe

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When Prince Charles and his wife the Duchess of Cornwall toured Australia in 2018, the Duchess was so impressed with her visit to the charity providing mobile showering and laundries to people who were homeless on the street, that she put her hand up to be the first volunteer if the charity ever comes to the United Kingdom (SBS News 2018).





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## Ground-up versus top-down

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- For Richard Titmuss (1970/2019), altruism and the desire to help each other is evidence of solidarity within society.
- E.g. The voluntary giving of blood to strangers is a key feature of a vibrant society.



# Subsidiarity

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“Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them”  
Pope Pius XI 1931



# Some caution

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- Localism: Suzanne Fitzpatrick and colleagues
- Drawing on his research from a soup kitchen in an exclusive London suburb, Martin Stone (2017: 158) sees the benefits of this charity as it brings together people from “different social stratum” – middle class volunteers and the homeless – so that the homeless can “develop the social skills and self-confidence to confront life more positively.”

# Building up the foci

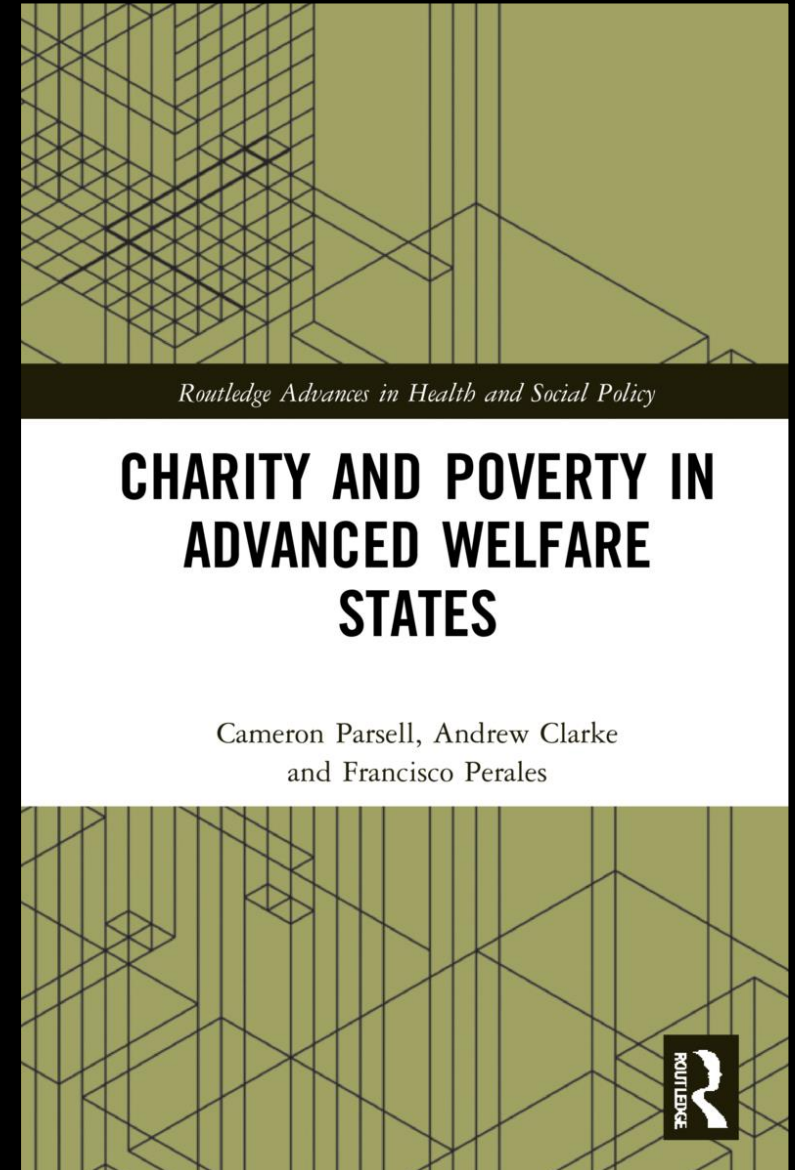
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- People motivate to do good
- Clear need
- Unambiguous impacts of unmet need
- Meeting the need is probably a sign a moral human conduct and a positive society
- But, giving a person in need something is far from unproblematic

# Our research

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- We examine resurgence of charity in our recent book
- What's charity's role in contemporary societal responses to poverty?
- How is it understood/perceived?
- How is it experienced?
- What are its consequences?
- How can it be transformed to help end poverty?





## Charity's role in poverty responses

- Inextricably related to changes in welfare provision
- Welfare cuts worsen poverty, increase reliance on charity
- Increasing government funding & support for charity

# Changing citizenship ideals

- Partly about reducing welfare costs, austerity<sup>1</sup>
- However, also reflects changing citizenship ideals
- From social citizenship to *ethical citizenship*<sup>2</sup>





# Ethnical citizenship

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- New emphasis on ethical duties over social rights
- Today's 'good citizen' takes responsibility for social problems
- Mobilise bottom-up community responses
- Do not wait for government to do it for them
- Encapsulated by former PM Morrison: true Australians 'make a contribution rather than take one'



# Charity's meaning

- Public understandings foreground significance for giver & society
- Celebrate givers' compassion & ingenuity
- Charity promoted as cultivating resilient communities, solidarity
- Consequences for people in poverty largely overlooked; positive outcomes assumed

## Young Australians of the Year see Orange Sky charity boom 12 months on from award

By James Fettes

Posted Tue 24 Jan 2017 at 3:36pm



## Brisbane carpark turned into pop-up shelter for the homeless is changing lives already

Lucy Quaggin and Erin Edwards • 7NEWS • Published: Monday, 14 October 2019 3:23 PM AEDT



- The Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull described Orange Sky as a practical and innovative idea that ‘would go a long way to raising health standards and restoring dignity to homeless people’.
- I commend Nic and Lucas for their work and for being such amazing role models for our young people (Australian Capital Territory Government 2016)
- Provides significant support to Orange Sky Laundry co-founders : : : helping to deliver their vision of expanding nationally as quickly as possible (New South Wales Government 2015)



# Charity's consequences

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- Recipients' perspective provides insights into charity's consequences
- Charity central to many recipients' survival strategies
- Use charity to supplement inadequate welfare payments

**RESEARCHER:** What drives your need to come here?

**GOUGH:** Well, to put it bluntly, "f\*ck all" money. Rent is \$500 a fortnight and I get paid \$680. (Gough, research participant)

- It's always going to be humiliating and daunting. I don't think that that's going to change. I guess it's only out of absolute necessity that people like me go, "Well, you either suck it up and go get humiliated for a few hours and get food on the table for your children, or you don't get food on the table for your children. What's it to be?"



# Charity's consequences

- However, receipt of charity is shameful experience; avoided where possible
- Linked to feeling passive & dependent; inability to reciprocate
- Shame exacerbated by volunteers through interrogation, judgement
- Or attenuated by non-judgemental acceptance, unconditional support

“It’s the most degrading thing to have to do. Honestly, you feel like a real bum. It’s horrible.” (Julia, research participant)

# Backlash

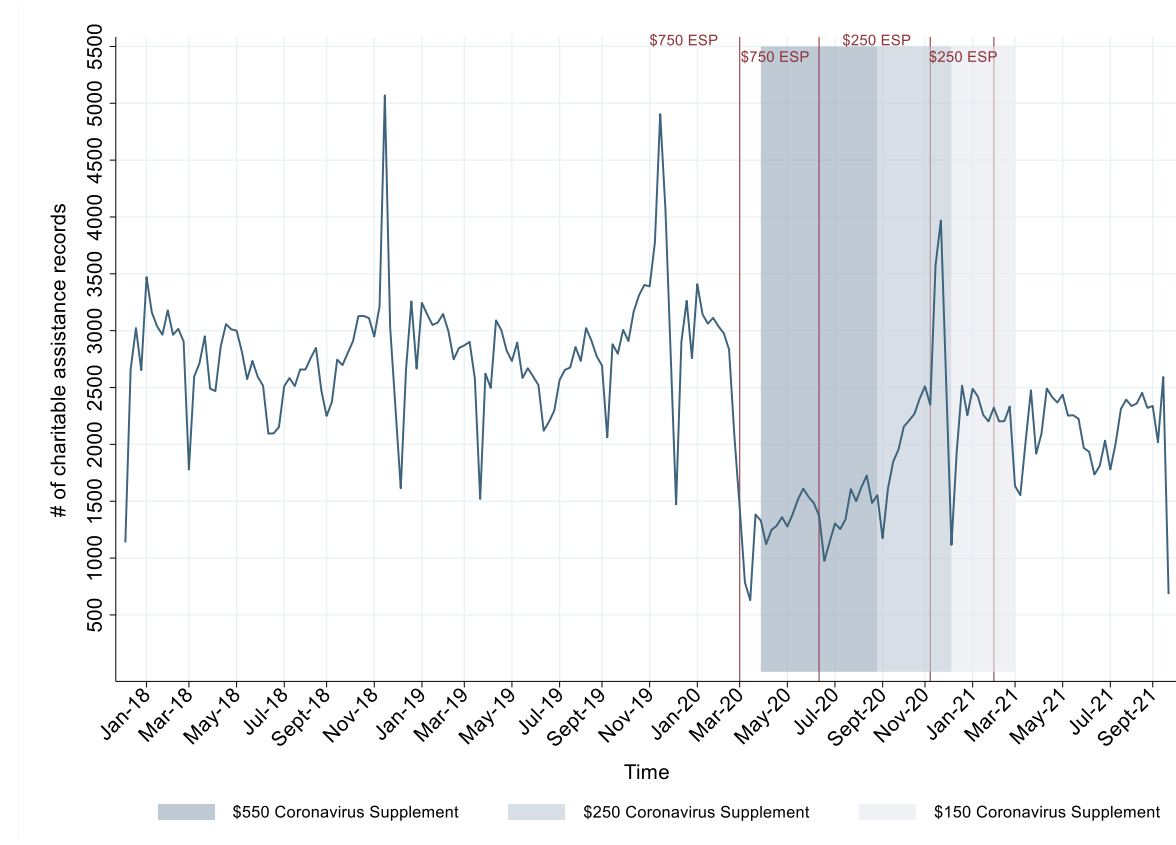
## **What homeless people really need is a home, not a clean shirt or bowl of soup**

By Cameron Parsell

“So, I really understand your concerns about Orange Sky Laundry of offering too many services which are really only a bandaid and also serve to make people more comfortable, but I think their great gift is to attract a generation of *young people to experiencing* the joy of giving and generosity of service to others”

# Key findings

- Assistance was at its lowest when the Coronavirus Supplement was at its highest
  - ↓ 47% in assistance at \$550 CS
  - ↓ 27% in assistance at \$250 CS
  - ↓ 23% in assistance at \$150 CS
- Similar pattern with the ESPs
  - ↓ 71% in assistance after 1<sup>st</sup> ESP
  - ↓ 46% in assistance after 2<sup>nd</sup> ESP
  - ↓ 22% in assistance after 3<sup>rd</sup> ESP
  - ↓ 23% in assistance after 4<sup>th</sup> ESP



- Increasing income support reduces the demand for ER

# Transforming charity

- While charity cannot address poverty alone, it can play a role *ending* it
- However, role must be based on needs of recipient
- Helps us thinking about what helping someone in poverty means
- As Joan Tronto says, the worth of care cannot be determined by asking the carer what they think





# Advocating for structural change

- Many established charity's do this, but the 'new bread' often do not
- Charitable in auspicious position to advocate for structural change
- Esteemed social position provides a platform for advocacy
- More freedom than orgs providing contracted services
- Bear witness to everyday struggles of people in poverty
- Form relationships as basis for solidarity & struggle

- Voluntary action is needed to do things which the State should not do... it is needed to do things which the State is most unlikely to do. It needs to pioneer ahead of the State and make experiments. (Beveridge 1948: 301-2)
- The Australian Government proposed legislation to deregister charities for a range of activities, including activism and protest

# Transforming charitable encounters

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- Charity should also continue to provide direct support/relief
- However, this should be done in a way that minimises shame
- This may include providing access to support with few conditions
- Ability for people to tell their story in their own words
- Focus on strengths as well as struggles
- Provide opportunities for reciprocity



# Liberation Theology

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- “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist” Camara
- God wants justice, not sacrifice (Gutierrez 1988)