

ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK SOUTH AUSTRALIA



MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

RoboDebt: Symptom Of A Cultural Illness

We Need To Tackle The Culture Of Welfare-Bashing That RoboDebt Came From

In light of the release of the Report of the Royal Commission into RoboDebt, Anti-Poverty Network SA would like to comment on how this is not just a story of the blatant illegality of a few Ministers and bureaucrats, but is **the result of a culture that has long been manifesting, a culture that looks at welfare recipients as criminals**.

To quote the report: "*...people who receive income support payments can in reality be subject to stigmatisation and social, cultural, and structural stereotypes, producing feelings of shame, oppression, isolation, and dehumanisation.*"

These themes of dehumanisation and stigmatisation are not just the ramblings of a cruel subsection of the political spectrum, but are in fact pernicious ideas scattered throughout our society, and aided by much of the media industry.

It should not be contentious that all people should be seen as valuable, and deserving of dignity, and security.

However, the troubles of the general population that are frustrated with the current economic system are blamed on scapegoats – and welfare recipients are one of the most commonly-used scapegoats.

This stigma and scapegoating has led to a culture that sees every vulnerable person who needs help as a possible welfare 'cheat', or 'dole bludger'.

Anti-Poverty Network SA spokesperson, Brendan Folwell, says, "*It is a continual battle to take care of my mental health and secure my view of my own self worth when the news or people in day to day life complain about welfare recipients, and dehumanise us.*

When confronted about these views by someone on welfare there is a response of "I am not talking about you", however, it is little comfort.

We are people who are doing what we can to get by and contribute to our society as much as we possibly can.

In the preface to the report, there is a call for these attitudes to be dropped by politicians", Mr. Folwell said.

Anti-Poverty Network SA asked members to comment on the impacts of harmful attitudes towards people receiving welfare:

"I like to be honest and see what their reaction is when I say I'm unemployed. They don't know my medical history, nor is my medical issue obvious. Often my reply is met with puzzlement, or an awkward silence, or an insincere, "well something will come your way".

The other difficult conversation is around welfare. My conservative, Liberal-voting, Jaguar-driving, two-house-owning, Chardonnay-swilling father is quick to judge people relying on welfare. But has no concept of how other people live, or the problems they face, or the impact his Liberal-Party-voting has.

Keep the poor people poor, they don't deserve housing, or a liveable level of Income Support. There are two worlds I live in, my life living in Poverty, and the weekly family dinner in the Land of Wealth, Privilege and Success."

And this, from another member:

"In everyday conversation people often ask, "what do you do?" The absolute shift in the way people address and treat me in the answers I've given over the years is a solid example of the stigma I've experienced. I also know many people lie about their careers when asked to avoid the same."

"There is hope that the findings of the report will aid in the breaking down of these attitudes however this report will not be enough to undo decades of this narrative", Mr. Folwell said.

"We can start this change by raising welfare rates to at least \$88 a day and abandoning the "mutual obligations" regime that preys on vulnerable people already in rough situations.

We need to push back against this dehumanisation of our fellow people. We wait to see what happens in the aftermath of this report. But we will continue to fight for a better future where people on welfare payments are treated like the people they are by their government", Mr. Folwell said.

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