
2009 was a very successful year for SJSC in many ways but most salient is the income to UWS. We brought $1.1Million into the University. This included research projects ($819K) and postgraduate research students ($235K). Publications and grants generated another $69K. The graph shows how the 2 main income sources have increased over the past 2 years.

We recognise several major contributing factors to the significant increase in research income. First is the growth in our members both in number and in their research capacity. A major focus of SJSC is the fostering of research capacity for early career researchers, more experienced researchers and those who have not had the opportunity to explore their interests in the past. Also we recognise the tireless work of our Research Program Coordinator, Peri O'Shea, who encouraged and assisted us all, while dealing with all the tedious aspects, like budgets. Mid-2008 was also the first time in 3 years we had a Director rather than a series of people acting in the position as well as having 2 academics seconded to SJSC. Although we were already members of SJSC, the placements allowed us to focus on research activities. The strategy was the idea of our Executive Dean who obtained permission for Board of Trustees’ funding to be reallocated. Clearly the strategy has worked superbly.

Not only did research income increase but also PhD completions improved from 3 in 2008 to 7 in 2009. We recognise our members as a great bunch of supervisors but also the role of the post-graduate student support officer. This position is an initiative of SJSC but like all good ideas it needed a good practitioner. Janette Welsby has taken the job for the last 2 years and turned it into a model for others. SJSC post-grads have enjoyed seminars, a writing retreat and assistance with all aspects of their candidature.

Of course the million dollar question is whether we can better this performance in 2010. We have made a good start to the year with $200K so far and another $1.5 Million in applications / negotiations and 4 PhD theses under examination.

However, a research group does not create itself to make money and this applies particularly to a research group focusing on social justice. In this newsletter and the ones that follow we present some snapshots of our work whereby we address issues of social injustice through research.

Rosemary Leonard
Leader, Social Justice & Social Change Research

ISCI and Beyond: Counting Children In

SJSC marked the 20 year anniversary of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child by hosting a series of events which promoted child well-being. Leading international experts gathered at the UWS Parramatta Campus from 3-5 November, 2009, for a conference and symposium.

Professor Jan Mason said that the events focused on children as the experts in their own lives: “While adults can have knowledge about children’s lives, children themselves are the experts on their lives as they are living them.”

The SJSC symposium on the 3rd of November on the topic of Children as Experts in Their Own Lives included:

* A presentation by primary school children on “Concepts of maturity: Some children’s views on what adults researching children need to know”.
* A keynote presentation by Professor Mary Kellett, from Open University in the UK, on issues related to children as researchers.

Following the symposium, from November 4-5th, speakers and delegates shared their knowledge on measuring and monitoring child well-being on issues such as economic status, health, education and safety issues at the 2nd Conference of the International Society of Child Indicators (ISCI). With the theme of “Counting Children In!” this conference was opened by the NSW Minister of Community Services, who was welcomed by UWS Vice-Chancellor Professor Janice Reid. It featured an exciting line up of speakers and delegates from Australian and overseas institutions. “The conference and symposium looked at ways of measuring the status of children, as well as explore research methods for promoting the health, development and well-being of children globally,” said Professor Mason.

Following on from these events, SJSC has is an ongoing commitment to facilitating ‘children as researchers’. Building on the momentum of the Children as Experts Symposium, for example, Jan Mason is co-editing with Professor Susan Danby, of QUT, a special edition of the ‘Child Social Indicators’ Journal. They have accepted 15 offers of papers for this special edition. These papers fall into two categories ‘Research Methods and Issues in Child Research’ and ‘Children’s Lives and Experiences’.
Biggest bang for the buck

The award for the research with the greatest impact for a small investment must go to the project Purchasing, Partnerships & Social Contracts: Giving effect to Government-NGO relationships. With a relatively modest budget of $20K a UWS Partnership grant the research team’s report “A Question of Balance” had a profound influence on the Productivity Commission’s inquiry into the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector (Productivity Commission, 2010).

In reference to our report (submission 159) recommending core principles the Productivity Commission listed the principles (Box 12.5) and recommended “… that the Australian Government ask the Department of Finance and Deregulation to develop a common set of core principles to underpin the development and negotiation of human services contracts and service agreements.”

They also recommended a Nation-wide approach: “There would be value in the principles being referred to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) with the intention of developing a nationally consistent approach.”

Our report was taken up by the media with a half page spread in the Australian Financial Review (4.9.09) with the dramatic title “Draconian contracts dog NGO reforms”. Reporter Verona Burgess points out that there is no point in the government developing contracts with the sector if it does not “clean up its own house first”.

In the Sydney Morning Herald, (29.8.09 Business p5) Clancy Yeates’s headline was “Fixation on competition threatens charity sector” in which he uses our report to show that “having non-profit groups engaging in cutthroat competition has produced some poor not to mention perverse results.”

This project amply demonstrates the benefits of collaboration. Eric Sidoti from the Whltam Institute, provided the political acumen and coordination, Robin Banks from Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) mobilised pro-bono lawyers to analyse government contracts, Jobs Australia provide the $10K for the partnership grant and SISC researchers Rosemary Leonard, Michael Darcy and Peri O’Shea contributed the grant application, research design and helped interpret the findings, including linking them with local and international research in the field.

New ARC: Children, community and social capital

Jan Mason, as Adjunct Professor with SISC, is the second-named Chief Investigator on an ARC linkage project commencing this year, ‘Children, Community and Social Capital in Australia’. The lead CI is Dr Sharon Bessell of the ANU and the Partner Organisation is the Benevolent Society. It is hoped that this project will contribute to an understanding of children’s roles and contributions to their communities in Australia, and to a strengthening of policies and interventions relating to social inclusion, community strengthening, children’s well-being and family policy. Currently, there is a strong policy focus on children’s issues in Australia, but children’s own experiences and perspectives are often missing from policy deliberations. This research will provide the foundation for policy and interventions which are inclusive of children and which value children as community members and citizens.

Neglected not Rejected: A Saga of Publishing in an A* Journal

SISC has always been strong in publications; with 90 publications in 2007-8 it out-performed all Centres and Groups in the College of Arts except for CCR. SISC recognises the importance of publishing in high ranking journals.

Dennis Garland, a recent PhD graduate from SISC, had been encouraged to publish by his supervisor, Michael Darcy. The article was an exploration of the discourses informing and transforming Salvation Army social policy through its participation in the Job Network, inspired by Dennis’ many years in the Army. So, typically for SISC, it was an applied, contextualised piece of research. With the introduction of journal rankings, it seemed strategic to aim for a prestigious A* journal.

Dennis reflects “In 1972 I first heard the phrase ‘publish or perish’. My history Lecturer at ANU came storming into a lecture and loudly bemoaning the fact that he was required to publish regularly; he then yelled ‘Publish and be damned’. He was not a happy camper but he did point to the growing trend that has now, to mix the metaphors, grown into an irresistible force. So there was I joining the flow.”

They assiduously checked the Journal’s article requirements, word length, layout, citation policy; the whole lot and, after considerable effort and editing, submitted the article.

Then they waited; no rejection; in fact no response at all. After checking, they were advised that there was a transition in editors and were rewarded with a note to say the Journal would publish the article and some months later they received the referees’ reports. They made the changes were told that it would be published later that year but were asked to make some more minor changes.

Finally they were published; some two and a half years after beginning the whole process. While Dennis’ story does not inspire confidence in the process, nonetheless it is reassuring to know that engaged and applied research like Dennis’ has a place in the prestigious journals.

Acting Local but Thinking Global

UWS Adjunct Professor Chris Sidoti has been associated with SISC since its establishment, soon after the completion of his appointment as Australian Human Rights Commissioner.

Most of Chris’ work over the last decade has been international rather than domestic. He says, “I’ve been privileged to be able to make a contribution to social justice and social change through my human rights work in many countries, particularly in the Asia Pacific region but also in the United Nations human rights system.”

In 2009 Chris undertook projects in Asia, Europe and North America:

* human rights training courses in Malaysia, the Maldives and the Philippines
* capacity needs assessments of the human rights commissions in Malaysia and the Maldives
* an evaluation of the joint funding program of four European Governments for human rights organisations working in Palestine
* a review of the human rights funding program of a major New York foundation
* development of a program on human rights and sexual orientation and gender identity for Asia Pacific human rights commissions
* an evaluation of the Asia human rights program of a Swedish academic institute.

SISC Leader, Rosemary Leonard says “Many of SISC’s projects are focused on Greater Western Sydney but Chris keeps us informed of the global scene and carries the SISC banner overseas.” Like all effective social justice actors, we need to “Think Global” as we “Act Local”.

New Publication

This edited book is the result of collaboration between five countries in the Asia Pacific Region. It is auspiced by Childwatch International, a global research network. It explores the socio-cultural context of children’s participation in the five countries, in response to the obligations on these countries, as signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. While the legal mandating of participation has significant implications for children’s lives and adult-child relations, research in this area has been limited, particularly cross culturally.