

Anti-Poverty Week and Public Scribes

In 2008, an Anti-Poverty Week event encouraged people to “have a say” by providing scribes to record their public concerns. Letters were sent on to relevant politicians, media and other decision makers. On the steps of the Wesley Church on the Mall in Wollongong, letter writers documented the issues that keep people in poverty.

Poverty is much more than struggling to keep the roof over your head and food on the table. Poverty is also living without access to information, opportunities and social interaction that enriches your life and sustains your wellbeing. Citizens struggle with TAFE fees, worry about needing respite from their carer role, live in pain because they can't afford a dentist and are socially isolated as their money goes on absolute essentials.

“Yes I have things I want to say and I'm happy that I have a chance to say them”.

More than 150 people wrote letters with help from the scribes if needed. Some said they just wanted to talk a bit first about their concerns then put pen to paper.

Others read the prepared letters on various issues and if they represented their concerns, they signed them and put them in the stamped envelopes and sent them off.

The main topics of the day were:

- Housing, Department of Housing issues, and lack of access to affordable housing came up often.
- Centrelink issues such as penalties, lack of access for students, pension payments, lack of employment and non payment.
- Health and dental care were major concerns, particularly mental health, lack of support for those with ongoing serious health issues, poor hospitals, tax cuts instead of health infrastructure.
- The need for a fairer Australia and anti-poverty strategies to ensure that basic needs are met for all.