



**Wesley Centre for Life**

# Covering the cost of Education

RESEARCH RESULTS ON THE ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR  
LOW INCOME FAMILIES IN THE GEELONG REGION.

Terri Osburn  
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## **Acknowledgements:**

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## Summary

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Covering the cost of education for low income families is an ongoing challenge in many communities. Many welfare and government agencies are doing what they can to assist families with education costs; however waiting lists and demand on already stretched resources are resulting in many frustrations for families and agencies.

The Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment has identified 'access to education' through their Social Policy and Advocacy Service (SPAAS) as a key area of concern requiring further investigation and attention. Financial information provided by UnitingCare Geelong agencies is showing increasing demand on funding and additional pressure on already stretched resources. The research and information in this report has been commissioned as one response to the issue of accessing education for low income families, with funding provided for the project by the Geelong Community Foundation.

As many would appreciate, education takes place in various places and in various forms, from formal learning in school classrooms and school grounds -- to participating in after school activities such as various sports, arts or music. Having access and opportunity to these additional learning experiences is considered to be in many cases outside of the scope of many family budgets. If people are already having trouble meeting education costs, it can only be assumed that extra school activities would be out of the question.

The importance of these extra curricula activities however is not going unnoticed. They are recognised by parents, students, teachers, government bodies, welfare agencies and support groups as playing a significant role in the development of an individual and in turn to a community. However, when budgets are already stretched covering these costs is adding increasing pressure all around.

Encouraging and supporting community involvement, participation and inclusion, although so strongly supported, is limited to those who can afford the associated costs.

Although after school curriculum is not part of this report, further consideration should be given as to how this links in with what the Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment is seeking to address and the connections with:- intergenerational cycles, educational outcomes, employment, human dignity, inclusiveness and community participation of people in their communities where education plays a vital role in the ongoing active citizenship of individuals, particularly in low socio economic environments. Funding for these activities, currently in a potentially turbulent economy is well outside of what families and welfare agencies can provide, placing yet another level of pressure on children and families.

Therefore, in considering the overall content of this report and placing it alongside the Victorian Government's new Blue Print for Education and Early Childhood Development 2008, that states education as being one the "most effective pathways out of disadvantage and social exclusion", defining and understanding education in its entirety needs further consideration.

To be able to do this, the following key areas of recommendation should be further pursued:-

- ❖ Raise levels of awareness of the current issues, challenges and impacts of education at local, and state levels
- ❖ Maintain the current levels of funding as a minimum
- ❖ Understand and define education
- ❖ Undertake further research and investigation including in-depth surveying of students and parents that allows for the development of a stakeholder partnership plan that achieves sustainable, equitable and deliverable educational opportunities and outcomes for all
- ❖ Broaden people's knowledge and recognition in relation to life and learning in the development of an individual.

## Background

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State School education in Victoria is narrowly considered to be 'free learning'. Various support agencies consider that very little is offered and provided to cover the costs associated with the whole of education experience. With the ongoing costs of excursions, camps, school books, uniforms, information technology, transport and food, it is understandable that many families are struggling with the concept of 'free education' and are turning to support and welfare agencies for relief funding. This report looks at the various issues, challenges and barriers currently faced by many low income families in the Geelong Region and provides recommendations that may assist agencies and Government in determining a sustainable way forward.

Key report insights have been achieved by combining information from school surveys, conversations with school welfare workers, welfare agencies, and parents, as well as from data collected from various other reports and research papers.

The Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment auspiced this research and report as a result of funding from the Geelong Community Foundation.

For the Board members of the Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment it is important to identify these issues; to raise awareness; to engage in advocacy to help influence social policy towards retaining personal dignity and preserving the rights of every human being; to help in maintaining the common good of and for the community; and which includes the distribution of benefits and burdens, as all these are issues that the Board members consider to be part of their Social Policy and Advocacy Service (SPAAS).

The Social Policy and Advocacy Service seeks to enable analysis of social research -- as opposed to economic research --that offers a social justice perspective on social policy and community issues with a primary focus on issues affecting the Geelong community, particularly those considered by society to be 'disadvantaged'.

The Social Policy and Advocacy Service 'Access to Education Project' is one of two initial foci for the Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment. This focuses on the access to education amongst children from low income families by examining the issues raised as serious concerns by UnitingCare welfare agencies in Geelong around:-

- ❖ The timing of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the payment amount being sufficient for 'free' education
- ❖ The issue of access to lower cost clothing for students (e.g. being able to buy cheaper clothing options with an iron-on school logo instead of name brand/ school uniform clothing items
- ❖ The timing of schools camps in terms of their proximity to Christmas, and lobbying for the option of payment plans for school camps and fees
- ❖ Education being essential in breaking intergenerational cycles of unemployment and benefit dependence.

It should be noted that at the time of undertaking this report the UnitingCare agencies CONCERN and PEX were in the process of amalgamating into one agency called UnitingCare Geelong. The provision of data within the report has been based on the two agencies.

Although this report considers information from varying levels and perspectives of educational costs, it is by no means a full reflection of the extent of these issues.

It should be noted that 'access to education for low income families' is an extremely broad issue that should be considered in a more holistic manner with education costs being incurred from childcare and preschool through to apprenticeships and University. However for the purposes of this report, the focus is in the area of primary school and secondary school education, even though the financial pressures and burdens continue to be challenging and stressful, regardless of the level of education.

The financial implications and costs of education, although being covered in most instances by families, communities, welfare and government agencies, the burden of the intergenerational re-occurrence of these problems is not. It is the intergenerational issue that raises another area of serious concern, where resolving these challenges could be considered as a means to the end or an end to meet the needs.

Through its the various findings, the report demonstrates the complexities and challenges of the intergenerational issue, which is an issue that deserves a higher level of awareness and consideration, and on a much broader scale. This level of awareness is one step in the process of understanding the financial cost of education, and the cost to an individual and a community.

The importance and role of education, at whatever level or manner -- formal education, life experiences, social interaction, participation or inclusiveness -- all these have direct effects on personal human dignity and on the social rights of a person; and on their ongoing development and growth individually and collectively, which has subsequent ramifications at a community and/or a national level.

## **Purpose**

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The purpose of this report is to address issues identified under the Social Policy and Advocacy Service (SPAAS) in relation to 'access to education amongst children from low income families'.

The aim of this report is to provide recommendations on which lobbying strategies can be drawn, to advocate and influence social policy toward human dignity and rights for the common good of the community. This includes the distribution of benefits and burdens, and responsible stewardship of the environment within the City of Greater Geelong region. This report is intended to be used as a tool to report to the media and to the community; to lobby schools and governments as is appropriate.

## **Methodology**

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The collection of information was undertaken through a number of processes including: phone conversations, informal consultation with families, completion and consolidation of school survey responses, discussions with school and agency representatives including welfare agencies and support groups, internet research, and collection and review of information from existing reports, documents and papers.

The theoretical basis of this report builds on data supplied, and is reflected in tables throughout the document. Surveys were sent to every school in Geelong -- State, Catholic or Private. The survey results were consolidated into tables and common themes emerged. The results of the school surveys support a number of the issues identified by welfare agencies, particularly in the area of accessing low cost clothing items and knowledge of support services.

Telephone and personal discussions with school welfare workers also raised and highlighted common themes, and in some instances, individual knowledge, experiences and stories that although very relevant and significant to this report, they have been excluded for the privacy of those concerned.

It was important to understand the demographics of Geelong, and community profiles and make-ups which were a key area when considering the broader level of accessing education. Information supporting this has been collected from various internet sites including [www.census.com](http://www.census.com) and [www.id profile](http://www.id profile).

As a result of these processes there came the realisation that a number of reviews, research and reports have already been completed by many different groups at varying levels, including government bodies. To consider all this accumulated information would be beyond the limitations and time frames of this project, however in the context of this report some reflections have been made on these earlier documents.

The size of this project proved to be larger and more difficult to define as the collection of information and research boundaries continued to grow throughout the report process. Collecting financial information from welfare agencies was also challenging, as each agency has different methods of recording information.

## Key Recommendations

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The following summary and key recommendations have been made as a result of the research and investigation carried out for the purposes of this report. However, it should be noted that these recommendations and the scope of this project should not be limited to just the outcomes provided here. The opportunity for further review and research should be considered with more in-depth analysis of the impacts, pressures and challenges currently and potentially being faced by families. In particular in a time of uncertainty with the current market downturn, changes in major and local manufacturing industries and the news of a well known childcare provider being placed in receivership. All of which would be considered to have a flow on effect to many families and communities in the Geelong region.

The Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment is committed to the provision and acceptance of the right to human dignity, social inclusion and to the participation of people in their communities, where education in the broader sense enables children and young people to play a vital role in the ongoing active citizenship of individuals.

It is from this perspective that the Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment in commissioning and publishing this report should be encouraged and supported via the following recommendations: assisting disadvantaged families with accessing education should be high on the agendas of all concerned, as are recognising the rights of children to receive an education that is just and equitable; accessible and valued, respected and inclusive, participatory and fun. Without this support and encouragement, the commitment, sacrifices and burdens will continue to be experienced by families; it will continue to cost money and resources; and it will continue to be unresolved.

**The following recommendations and responsibility levels are intended for consideration.**

### **1. Raise levels of awareness of the current issues, challenges and impacts at local and state levels.**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Responsible Body</b>
Define the issues and challenges	Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment
Expand the level of awareness	Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment
Lobby local and state levels on issues and challenges	Welfare agencies
Work with school groups and bodies on issues and outcomes from this report	Combined approach starting with the Wesley Centre

## 2. Maintain the current levels of funding as a minimum

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Responsible Body</b>
Continue funding to welfare agencies as a minimum to their current level.	Government grants/funding, contributions, support agencies
Continue provision of funds to support families with education costs will continue	Welfare agencies, government bodies
Seek additional funding to enable in the short term, support for a larger number of requests	Welfare and government bodies
Pursue opportunities to develop partnership projects and funding, that looks at a more holistic approach to education and welfare services including:- community development partnerships	Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment in conjunction with local government and state government agencies
Seek additional funding to undertake further research at a more detailed level, including surveying parents	Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment
Seek to provide funding opportunities to enable participation in alternative educational experiences, such as sport and recreation / social inclusion.	State Government, local agencies

## 3. Understand and define education

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Responsible Body</b>
Understanding the breadth of the boundaries of education	All
Define education more appropriately	All

## 4. Undertake further research/investigation, development of partnership plan

### Issue

Encourage schools and agencies to continue working together, and to recognise and be proactive in providing support services to families and students

Expand the knowledge base of schools to enable more effective referring of people to appropriate support services

Raise further at a local level an awareness of the financial pressures experienced by families and students

Raise and pursue further the awareness and lobbying opportunities at a government level:- the educational challenges and pressures currently being faced in everyday life for many families, because of their need to cover the costs of their children's education, and the associated activities which are all part of being an active citizen.

Encourage higher levels of consideration and involvement especially at parent level, to help bridge the gap, connect people to their communities, and to develop relationships and understandings on the importance of education and breaking the intergenerational cycles of indifference or ignorance.

Work on developing solutions that are sustainable, where education is considered a human right and people are empowered and encouraged to act.

Link Government reports, social demographics and local trends with the SPAAS program, including articulating the connections between government commitments in reports such as:- "Economic Independence and Social Inclusion" work being initiated by John Eren MP and Richard Marles and the Australia Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Building a Solid Foundation for school – a Communities Approach, and the recent launch of the Northern Futures Strategic Plan.

### Responsible Body

State Government and local agencies

Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment in conjunction with other welfare agencies

Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment

Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment

Welfare , state and local agencies

State Government agencies

Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment

## **Undertake further research/investigation, development of partnership plan (cont.)**

### **Issue**

Develop a working group with representatives from the various agencies, support groups and schools to work together on understanding:-

- Who is doing what?
- What levels of funding are being distributed across Geelong and by whom?
- Work towards developing ideas and sustainable ways to support the ongoing relief needs of families.

Ensure all schools work together in providing equal and just education programs regardless of status.

Develop an easily accessible, comprehensive and consolidated information program / package about welfare and funding support services.

Raise awareness within government departments and agencies about the difficulties experienced by some people in applying for funding assistance (i.e. drought relief funds), and provide appropriate assistance to those who need help in completing these funding applications.

Trial a pilot program that provides opportunity for involvement in extra curricula activities.

### **Responsible Body**

Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment

State Government

Joint project

Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment

State and Local Government

## Key Findings

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The key findings of the research include many different and varied levels of information. The information has been categorised into;

- school survey results
- welfare agencies
- school welfare officers
- teachers
- principals
- a small group of parents in the Geelong area
- and a number of reports, documents and articles produced by many different authors.

## School Responses

- The survey, although relatively small in scale, does represent a 27% response rate, representing approximately 8,874 students; with a further seven schools articulating their lack of participation due to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development approval and policy processes that are required to be met before provision of information can be supplied.
- All schools in Geelong were sent survey forms, 22 responses were received combining principal and welfare worker comments. Follow-up phone calls were made where some additional comments were provided.
- During the examination of the school surveys, the responses indicated a lack of knowledge on the schools' behalf of the types of welfare support and funding options that can be pursued for families. The main referral point was to the State Relief Fund, with only four schools identifying welfare agencies such as UnitingCare Geelong as a potential source of education funding support. In considering this, it could be expected that if the knowledge base was expanded, the current levels of funding would need to be increased to cater for what would be anticipated as a much higher demand on funding.
- All schools who participated in the survey indicated that they had students from low socio economic families, and that 82% of schools are providing a welfare support person in some form to assist families and students with accessing and participating in education.
- From the surveys, 91% of schools already had payment plans in place for fees, including arrangements with families in relation to the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).
- School-associated fees ranged from \$100 to \$250 per student in State schools, with additional fees for excursions and camps, along with additional year level fees depending on subjects chosen.
- Fees for Catholic schools ranged from \$400 to \$1,400.
- Additional school expenses associated with the curriculum (camps / excursions) were being met in instances by the schools' budgets or various welfare agencies.
- Only two schools did not provide second hand uniform assistance.
- Less than 1% of schools indicated that they did not try to provide alternative options to accessing required text books (such as establishing a library / borrowing system).
- 18% of schools indicated there were no compulsory fees.
- 45% of schools were providing a breakfast program, with another three schools indicating they had previously provided a breakfast program (with these costs being met by the school's budget).
- Although the majority of schools recognise financial hardship as a current issue, few schools seemed to be able to identify support services or agencies to refer families to for some assistance.
- The biggest referral point from schools for assistance was the State School Relief Fund.

- 95% of schools indicated that students would not be excluded from camps or activities if the costs could not be met by families.
- Schools identified that where necessary, options were pursued to support application for funding, including State School Relief Fund, Drought Relief Funds (although this process was identified as time consuming and quite difficult).
- 41% of schools indicated some corporate sponsorship arrangements had been put in place to assist with additional costs (including clothing support from Target, and grants from Alcoa).
- Re-occurring family issues such as drugs and alcohol were flagged by schools mainly from within areas of disadvantage.
- The continued intergenerational cycle of disadvantage within families was identified as a concern for schools, welfare workers and agencies.

***Welfare agencies, officers, principals and teachers revealed that;***

- Participation and inclusiveness in education is considered high on the agendas of all who were involved in this report, however there is recognition that without ongoing commitment from Government, agencies, families and students, achieving and breaking the intergenerational cycles of disadvantage is going to be an ongoing challenge.
- A different level of commitment is going to be required from all government levels in order to establish what can be considered as 'free' education, equality and active participation.
- Alcohol and drug related issues are impacting on student wellbeing and development.
- Family breakdowns or separations are causing and affecting learning abilities of students.
- Mental health status of students and families is becoming an increasing concern.
- Pressures on students to manage family life as well as schooling is increasing.
- Teachers are spending considerable amounts of time assisting students and families with welfare issues.
- The value of education is undermined by parents in some communities.
- Some students as young as primary school level are being required to look after younger siblings resulting in ongoing absences from school.
- Funds totalling \$102,000 were allocated solely for education purposes between UnitingCare CONCERN, UnitingCare PEX and the Salvation Army in the Geelong region in the last 12 months.
- Students need to feel valued and important, and that they are positive contributors to society.
- Issues of bullying were identified as a result of students not having the appropriate footwear to help them fit in with other students.
- Intergenerational disadvantage is considered to be an ongoing concern for agencies, schools and welfare officers.
- Agencies are finding increased demands on resources, causing frustrations for staff and volunteers, and they are often having to turn people away.
- UnitingCare Geelong graphs demonstrate increases in funding demands over time.
- Collection and consolidation of financial information across the various agencies was difficult to obtain due to the methods of data recording within the various agencies and the accessibility to such information.

### **Parents and students who also provided information indicated that:-**

- ❖ Many families of primary and secondary school students are struggling with the costs associated with education, the pressures of paying fees, purchasing uniforms and books and the timing of this in relation to Christmas.
- ❖ For some families, expectations and levels of pride are resulting in additional burdens and pressures as they seek to meet the necessary costs of education.
- ❖ Support services for immigrant families is limited and waiting lists are in place for areas including access to tutors.
- ❖ Involvement for students in additional fee structured activities after school is creating and resulting in tension for families, where children are feeling excluded and not part of their community. This is an area that is considered undervalued in the scheme of the overall participation of people in their community whether it is for the local sports club, dance group, accessing the library or just social involvement. Lack of inclusion can often result in bullying, social isolation, reduced confidence, community participation and loss of respect
- ❖ Education is not just about the children but the parents and the community. Often the parents are early school leavers themselves who do not value education therefore creating a flow on effect to the children.
- ❖ Within the Government's commitment to schooling a broader approach needs to be taken, not just in delivering training centres and technology but in bridging the gap for many communities.
- ❖ Ways to deliver fun and exciting education programs need to be pursued, where children and parents believe that they are missing out if they are not involved.
- ❖ Raising the importance of education to parents and children needs a greater focus.
- ❖ Being involved and encouraging participation in various forms could be pursued at a local level, encouraging active citizenship in communities.
- ❖ Recognising the links of social inclusion and community participation with other forms of education.

## Areas of Interest

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In relation to the areas of interest raised within the SPAAS policy, the following conclusions have been made:-

### Issue

The timing of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the payment amount being sufficient for 'free' education

The issue of access to lower cost clothing for students (e.g. being able to buy cheaper clothing options with an iron on school logo instead of name brand / school uniform clothing items).

The timing of school camps in terms of proximity to Christmas and lobbying for the option of payment plans for school camps and fees

Education being essential in breaking intergenerational cycles of unemployment and benefit dependence.

Consider the links of the two initial foci of the SPAAS program - the cost of education for low income families and suicide.

### Responsible Body

The timing in general is a concern, including when the EMA is received, and the scheduling of when books and uniforms purchases are required in relation to high cost times of the year (i.e. Christmas)

EMA and other recent payments are still not covering the full costs of education as demonstrated through continued allocations of grants from welfare and support agencies.

Most schools are providing options for access to low cost clothing, including second hand options, Target vouchers and alternative options. However, in these areas there are still increasing demands.

Schools are doing everything they can to cover the costs of camps and excursions, to ensure every child has the opportunity to participate.

This is the largest issue of all, requiring further in-depth review and research

Understanding the pressures and challenges on families and students over daily education costs and inclusion, may indeed have increased links with depression, mental health status and suicide.

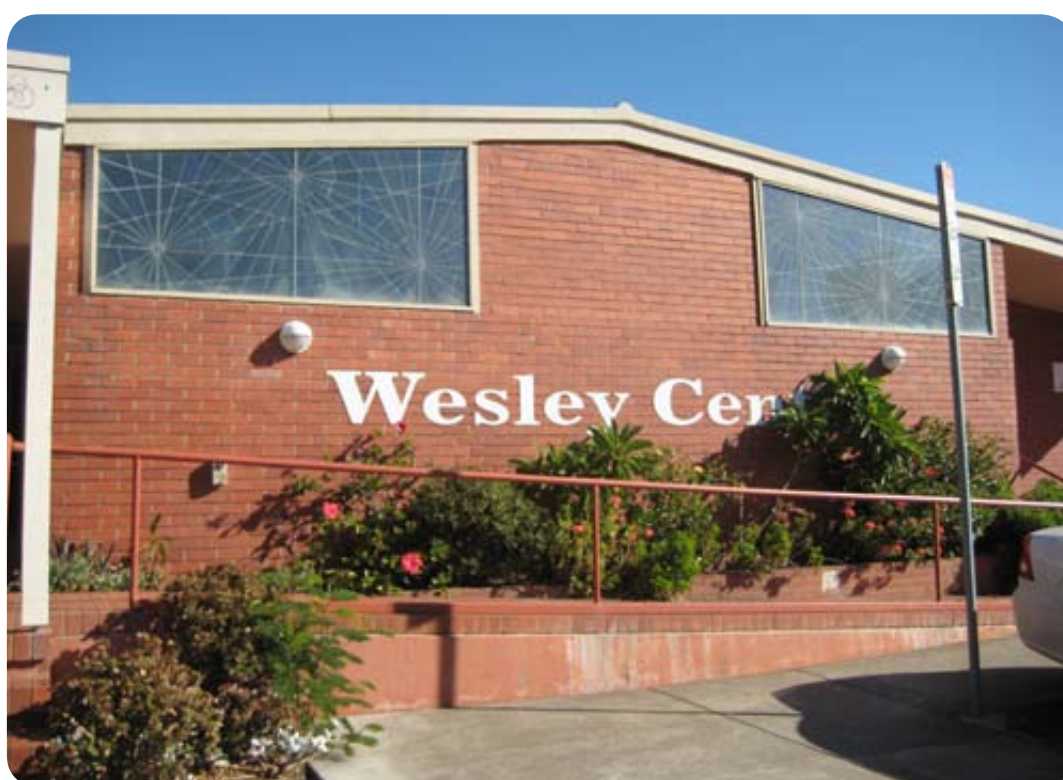
## Background - UnitingCare

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The Uniting Church in Australia was formed on 22nd June 1977, as a union of three churches: the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

The Uniting Church is the third largest Christian denomination in Australia. It has around 2,800 congregations and six Synods. Uniting Church members number 300,000 while 1.3 million Australians claim an association.

UnitingCare Geelong is an agency of UnitingCare Community Service Network. The Uniting Church's beliefs and values has sometimes drawn it into controversial situations and it has long taken a role in the political arena, encouraging moral, social and ethical integrity including being at the forefront of Aboriginal rights issues and the Native Title debate and reconciliation. "The Uniting Church sees the Gospel as something that is significant for the whole of life and to the whole of community" (Reverend Paul Stephens).



The Uniting Church's statements underline a commitment to its members / agencies and are committed to listening, seeking to hear the voice of the local people, immersing themselves in local culture and responding by offering support, encouragement and empowerment. This is particularly so in the area of human rights, where the dignity of people should be/ need to / required to be respected, however different their way of life.

The Uniting Church in Australia is the largest non-government provider of community services in Australia. It is a multicultural church, striving to treat people on an equitable basis and seeks to give a voice to the poor, outcast and needy.

A national network of community services within the Uniting Church known as UnitingCare was launched in 2000, and it has a strong focus upon advocacy on behalf of UnitingCare agencies and missions. The UnitingCare network across Australia consists of over 400 community service agencies, thousands of projects and programs, more than 36,000 staff and over 24,000 volunteers. The network serves around 2 million Australians each year and provides services in the areas of aged care, childcare, children and youth, family support, housing, disability, remote communities and emergency relief. ([www.unitingcare.org.au](http://www.unitingcare.org.au))

Operating as agencies within the Uniting Church is UnitingCare CONCERN and PEX, which have recently amalgamated to UnitingCare Geelong. These organisations were founded specifically to assist and support individuals and families in need. They seek to address social issues, along with other Church and community bodies, and they provide material and / or financial assistance to meet immediate needs, provision of basic advice and advocacy, referrals to specialist community services, budgeting advice, client social activities, ongoing client support, and educational assistance for students, Christmas food / toys, and low cost clothing at opportunity shops.

It is the volunteers of these groups that are the strength of these groups, with local people supporting local people. They reflect God's compassionate love for all and the dignity of human life. The two areas of operation are welfare and opportunity shops. Therefore their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of current financial pressures should be considered in high regard, as they are at the grass root level of community need, issues and challenges. It is from the information collected / provided from these committed staff members and volunteers that this report has been able to reflect on and achieve the aims of the Uniting Church and the Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment. This includes being able to work together on a challenge, and being open to better ways to achieve a purpose that addresses injustice, and working together to overcome disadvantage and strengthen communities.

## Background - Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment

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Wesley Uniting Church was formerly the Yarra Street / Wesley Methodist Church, and at Church Union in 1997, the congregations of the Wesley Methodist Church, the St Giles Presbyterian Church, and the Geelong City Congregational Church united to form one congregation, which now worships at the Wesley Uniting Church, situated at 100 Yarra Street Geelong, and is part of the Uniting Church's Geelong City Parish.

The Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment is an outreach agency under the umbrella of the Geelong City Parish of the Uniting Church and UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania.

The Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment provides caring, counselling, and education services to the community, with a variety of activities for people of all ages. The Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment --

through its Social Policy and Advocacy Service --has identified the issue of 'access to education for low income families' as a priority, due to the reported pressures and impacts being experienced by other UnitingCare agencies in Geelong. These agencies (CONCERN and PEX) provide welfare support in the form of clothing, food vouchers, counselling and emergency relief.

The Wesley Centre for Life Enrichments 'Social Policy and Advocacy Service' (SPAAS) seeks to access research, provide analysis, and to engage in advocacy; in order to influence social policy towards preserving human dignity and the rights and common good of the community, including the distribution of the benefits and burdens.

The first two SPAAS projects have been identified as:-

- ❖ 'Access to Education amongst Children from Low Income Families'
- ❖ 'Community Education and Suicide Awareness and Prevention'

The 'Access to Education' project has been funded by the Geelong Community Foundation and an extension of thanks is offered to them for providing the opportunity for this research to be completed.

## Community Profile - Geelong Demographics

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Geelong is located in south west Victoria, about 75 kilometres south west of Melbourne ,and is named from an Aboriginal word which means “a place of the sea bird over the white cliffs”. It is a rural, residential, resort, industrial and commercial area and is the largest regional city in Victoria. Population growth took place in early 1900’s particularly during the 1920’s, with the most significant development occurring in the post-war years, particularly during the 1960’s and 1970’s, aided by the rapid expansion of industry, the construction of public housing estates and immigration. (www.id.com.au/profile)

The G21 Region is the same as the Barwon Statistical Division and comprises Colac-Otway Shire, Golden Plains Shire, the City of Greater Geelong, the Borough of Queenscliffe and Surf Coast Shire. The demographic information has been collected from the 2006 Census www.abs.gov.au and from www.id.com.au/profile.

- The population of Geelong in 2006 was nearly 194,000 up from 173,000 in 1991. The age structure of the population is 60.1% from 18-64 years, 17.6% children 5-17 years, 14.2% mature adults 65 to 84 years, 6% infants 0 to 4 years and 2.1% senior citizens 85 years and over.
- Geelong is supported by industry sectors such as manufacturing (14.4%), retail trade (13.8%), health care and social assistance (11.7%). A total combination of 39.9% of a workforce where 34.6% of people work part time and 56.6% full time. A workforce that to some extent is reflective of the skill base, socio economic status, industry structure and factors including employment opportunities, educational levels of the local population; and the working and social aspirations of the population.
- An analysis of occupations held by the resident population of the City of Greater Geelong in 2006 shows the four most popular occupations are: professional (18%), technicians and trade workers (16.7%), clerical and administrative workers (13.4%), and labourers (12%).
- Gross household incomes indicate 23% are low income households while 16.7% earned a high income. (Low income considered as below \$350 per week and high income as over \$1,000 per week)
- Per week 16.9% of people earn less than \$350, 31.9% earn \$350 to \$999 and 40.4% over \$1,000.
- Family types are identified as: over 40% of total couples have children, 16% of families are one parent families, and 38% of couples are without children.
- There is no internet connection in 58.6% of households,
- 11% of households were paying high mortgage repayments (\$2,000 per month or more) and 34.3% paying low mortgage repayments (less than \$950 per month).
- Rental cost analysis indicated that just fewer than 50% of people renting were paying between \$140 and \$224 per week with another 16% paying between \$100 and \$139 per week.
- Geelong is ranked under the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA 2006) as the third highest area of disadvantage under the Local Government Areas in the G21 region. Suburbs in Geelong such as Corio, Norlane, Whittington, Newcomb and Breakwater are considered as areas of disadvantage with low incomes, high single parent families, high levels of unemployment and low school attainment rates. Whereas areas such as Wandana Heights, Highton, Newtown and Ocean Grove are more affluent with higher levels of income, larger proportions of people with formal education qualifications, dual incomes and two parent families.

The following tables are summaries from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

## Income analysis

As per the 2006 Census data, household gross weekly income in 2006 was:-

<b>Enumerated Data</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than \$350	12,585	16.9
\$350 - \$999	23,784	31.9
\$1,000 and over	30,169	40.4
Total households	74,591	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, 2001, 1996, and 1991.

## Education analysis

In 2006, 36.6% of the Geelong population left school at Year 10 or below, and 36.5% went on to complete Year 12 or its equivalent. The following table represents the number of persons attending an education institution in 2006:-

<b>Enumerated Data</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Attending preschool or primary school	19,722	33.4
Attending secondary school	13,992	23.7
Attending a tertiary institution	10,023	17
Total persons attending an education institution	59,058	

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, 2001, 1996, and 1991.

## Housing Tenure

Housing occupancy in 2006 was made up of the following:-

<b>Enumerated Data</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Owned	28,807	37.5
Purchasing	25,426	33.1
Renting	18,095	23.5
Total Dwellings	76,907	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, 2001, 1996, and 1991.

## Age Structure

The breakdown in age structure in 2006 for Geelong was:-

<b>Enumerated Data</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Infants 0 to 4 years	11,922	6
Children 5 to 17 years	34,703	17.6
Adults 18 to 64 years	118,694	60.1
Mature adults 65 to 84 years	28,086	14.2
Senior citizens 85 years and older	4,070	2.1
Total persons	197,475	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006, 2001, 1996, and 1991.

## Car Ownership

In 2006 the number of one and two vehicle households was very similar. However, on further review, the number of vehicles in disadvantaged communities is lower than those in more affluent areas, and this should be considered when looking at the access to education, accessibility, petrol costs and public transport.

## Agency Support Services

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There are various agencies, church and community groups in the Geelong region that provide financial support and assistance to those in need. This varies from agency to agency, and for the purposes of this report the following includes and is not limited to some of those services:-

The Smith Family - provide a scholarship program that provides ongoing support to families over the life span of a student's education. An application is required from parents, and payment is made annually. The allocation of funds is made by direct deposit to the family's bank account, and the amount varies depending on the year level of the student.

The Smith Family have approximately 600 families that they are currently assisting; total funding allocation amounts were unavailable from The Smith Family at the time of reporting.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence - St Laurence community services was established in 1996 after the Brotherhood of St Laurence divested its Geelong region operations. St Laurence is a not-for-profit organisation that relies heavily on government grants and community support to provide human services to thousands of people and their families in the Geelong region. Their mission is 'Helping people help themselves', and their vision and values reflect their core principles.

St Laurence work with and run a number of partnership projects that assist and support local communities. Some of the projects and partnership arrangements include:-

- ❖ A working bee in Corio with the Geelong Rotary club
- ❖ Partnership with Lara Secondary School providing opportunities for students to be introduced to volunteering and community development
- ❖ Projects and partnerships at Costa House with alterations to the garden area with thanks to McManus Real Estate, and an afternoon program with Geelong Grammar school.

Their total revenue for 2006/07 was in excess of \$32 million with expenses totalling more than \$27 million. Information on local allocations of funding were unavailable at the time of reporting. Their services and programs are extensive and further information can be obtained from their website at [www.stlaurence.org.au](http://www.stlaurence.org.au).

Salvation Army - is one of the largest and most diverse social welfare providers in the world. As an organisation they value human dignity, justice, hope, compassion and their community. A number of services are provided including aged care, community support, counselling, disability support, youth and children services, emergency relief, homelessness, social programs and much more.

Like UnitingCare Geelong, the Salvation Army Geelong branch is experiencing high demands for funding to assist families with the costs associated with education, particularly in the areas of information technology, and costs associated with TAFE courses, where very little assistance is currently being offered. An annual budget of \$9,000 is available to assist students in Years 11 and 12, and at tertiary level with school associated costs. Up to \$200 can be allocated for text books and material supplies, however this funding is not available until after January each year, when most schools have already lodged booklists, etc.

A voucher program of \$3,000 has also been established to purchase K Mart vouchers to assist families with purchasing school uniforms prior to Christmas. The number of families or children assisted to date is 54, with all of them receiving more than \$166 -- mainly for text books, chef equipment, tradesman's tools and memory sticks. The client base is made up of 30% between Corio / Norlane and Whittington.

A number of areas of concern have been raised in discussion with the Salvation Army, however have been excluded for the purposes of this report.

Rotary and Lions Clubs - Assistance from these groups varies from financial support in some areas to running fundraising events, donating books and / or equipment. A further review of this area of support has been considered.

These are just a few of the support agencies that are currently assisting families in the Geelong area.

It should be noted that all the above agencies also provide support services and referral options for emergency relief for food, accommodation and clothing.

## Data

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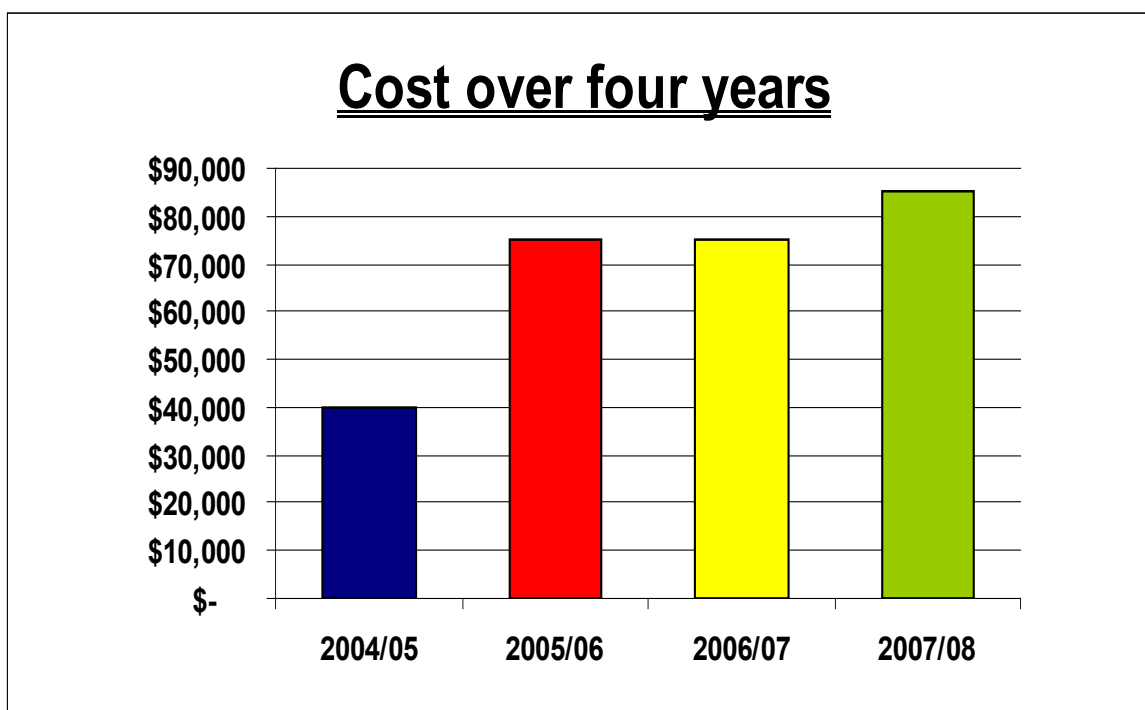
### UnitingCare Geelong / (CONCERN)

The financial support to education provided by UnitingCare Geelong has varied over the years, depending on what funding and grants have been received. There has also been a difference in the collection of information between UnitingCare PEX and UnitingCare CONCERN. UnitingCare PEX has previously supported students and families at a primary school level, and UnitingCare CONCERN has supported those at high school level. However, from 2008 the two services have amalgamated and will provide one level of education funding.

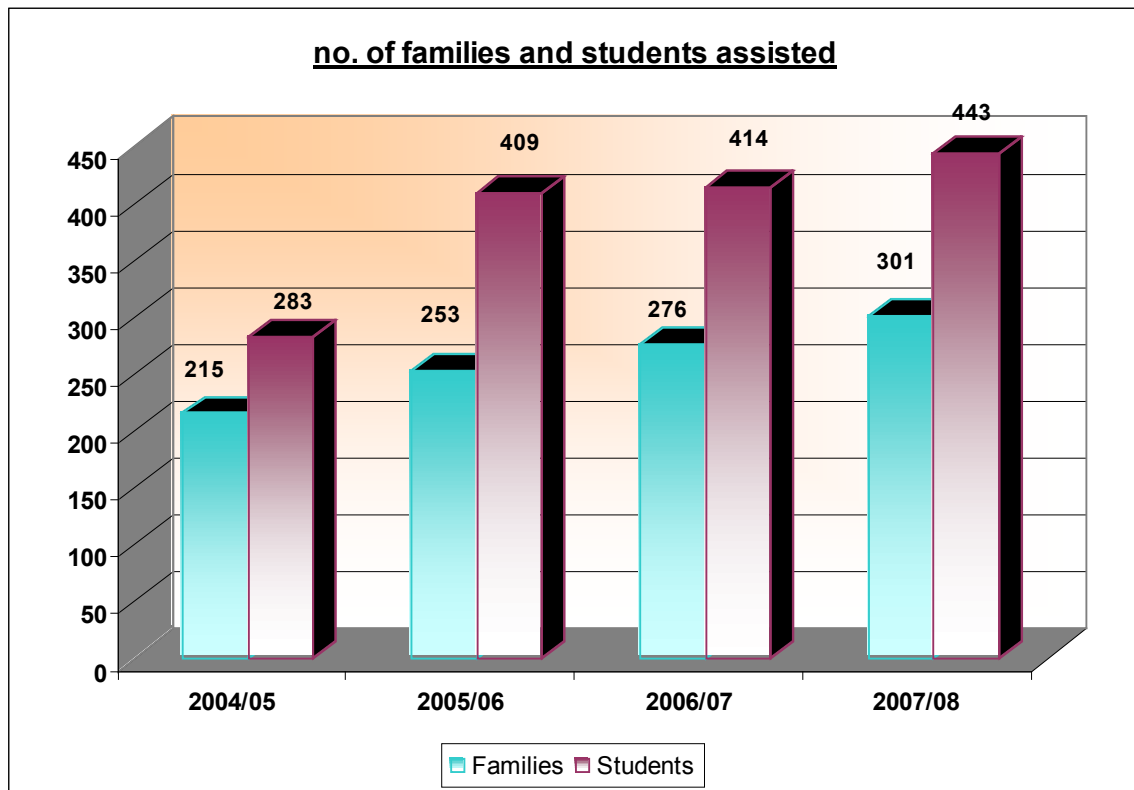
Access to financial information has been limited, however, the following details are those recorded from CONCERN:-

The number of students that have been assisted and the amounts allocated over the past four years are:-

Year	Families Assisted	Students Assisted	Cost \$	Average Per Student
2004/05	215	283	40,000	141
2005/06	253	409	75,000	183
2006/07	276	414	75,000	181
2007/08	301	443	84,974	192



Numbers of families and students assisted over four years. It is assumed from this information that many students are from within the one family.



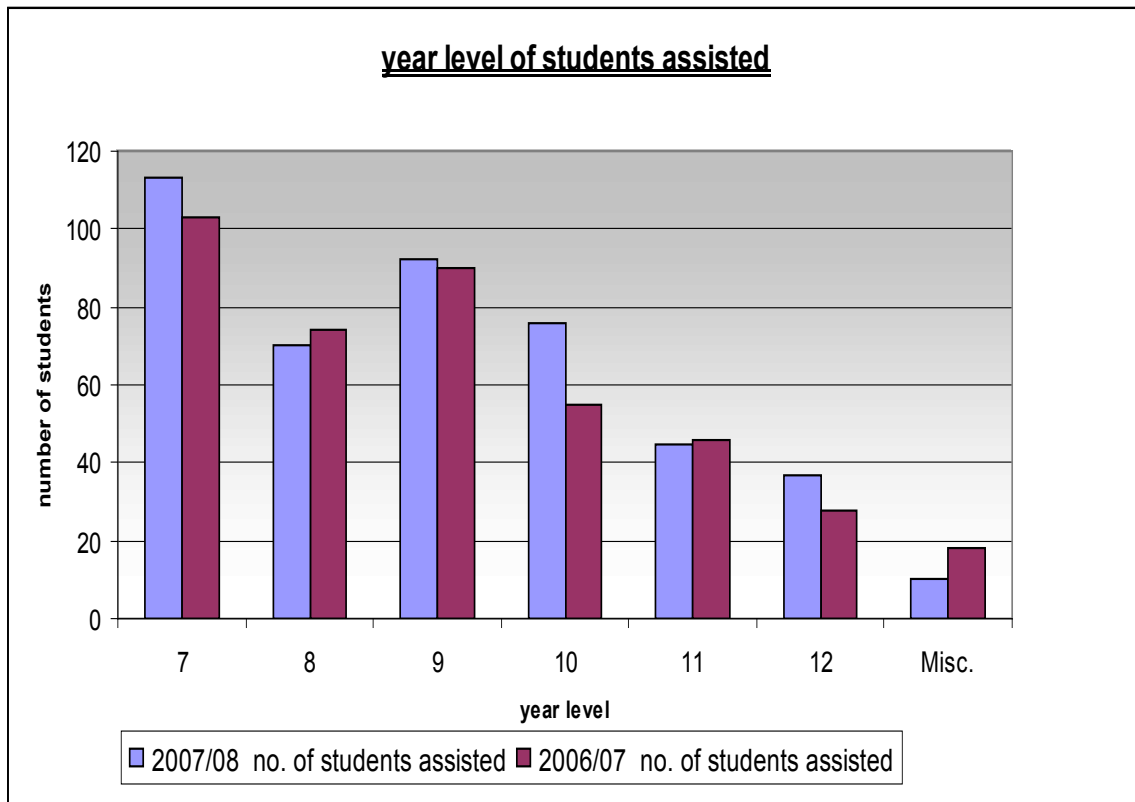
Schools supported over that time include:-

- ❖ Geelong High School
- ❖ Flinders Peak Secondary College
- ❖ Matthew Flinders Secondary College
- ❖ St Ignatius College
- ❖ Norlane High School
- ❖ Western Heights College: Barton, Quamby, Minerva Campus
- ❖ Bellarine Secondary College
- ❖ Oberon High School
- ❖ Newcomb Secondary College
- ❖ North Geelong Secondary College
- ❖ Corio Bay Senior College
- ❖ Grovedale College
- ❖ Belmont High School
- ❖ Lara Secondary College

The following table represents the number of students that have been assisted over the last two years and their year level.

Interestingly, the highest year level cost is Year Seven, and with the introduction of the School Start Bonus in 2008, the number of students assisted still did not decrease.

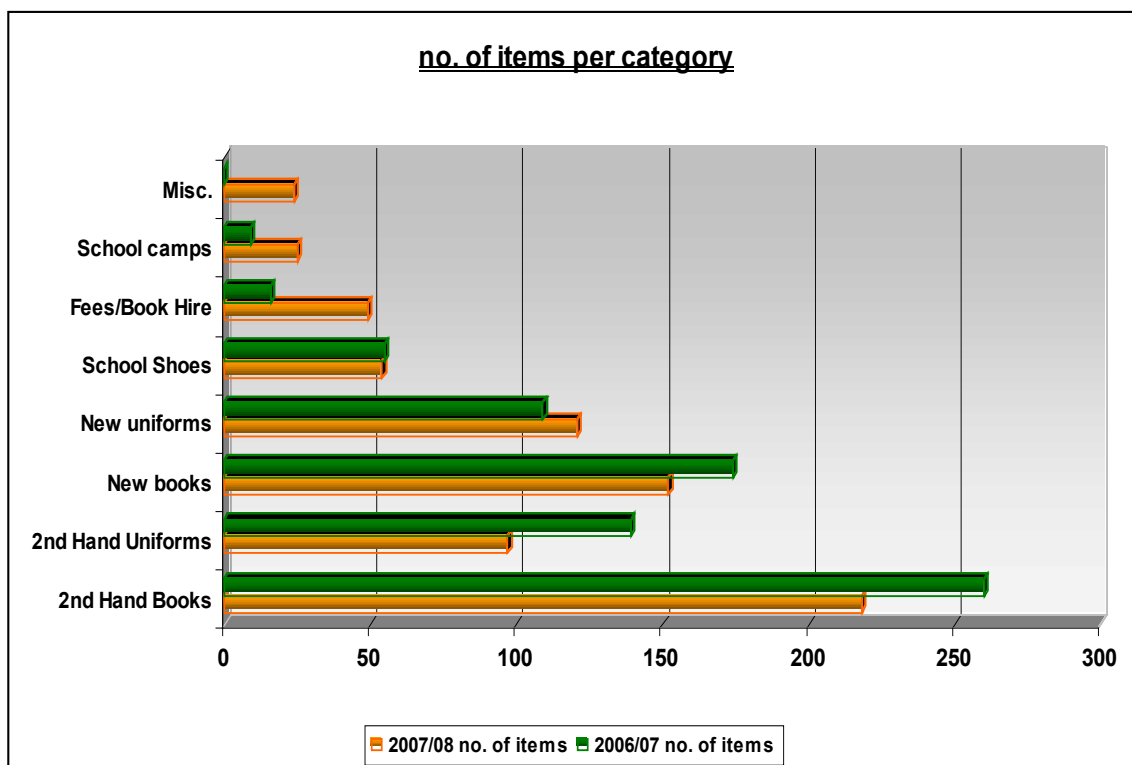
<b>Year Level</b>	<b>2007/08 No. of Students Assisted</b>	<b>2006/07 No. of students Assisted</b>
7	113	103
8	70	74
9	92	90
10	76	55
11	45	46
12	37	28
Misc.	10	18
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>414</b>



Out of the number of students who received help between 2006/07 and 2007/08, the following table is a breakdown of the number of each category item purchased:-

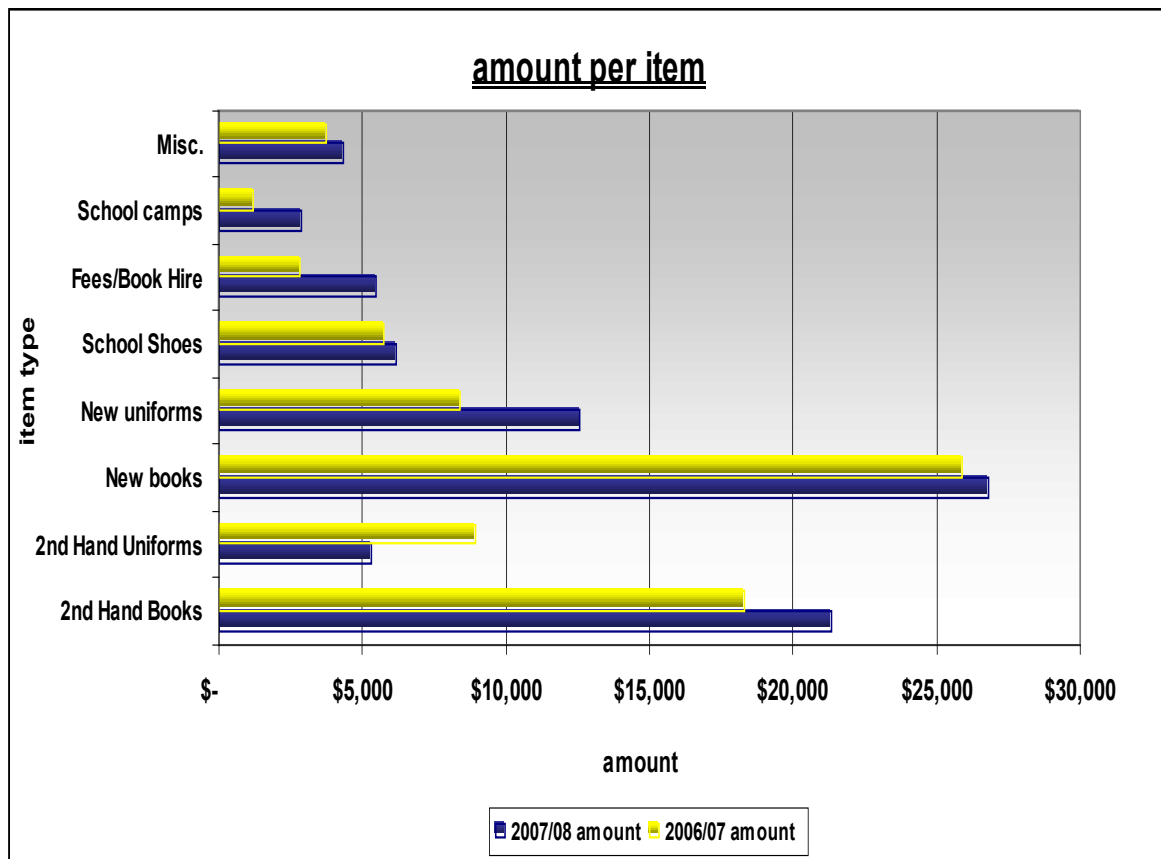
Item Type	2007/08 No. of Items	2006/07 No. of Items
2nd Hand Books	218	260
2 <sup>nd</sup> Hand Uniforms	97	139
New Books	152	174
New Uniforms	121	109
School Shoes	54	55
Fees / Book Hire	49	16
School Camps	25	9
Misc.	24	0

From this table it is assumed that although the number of items has decreased, the purchase costs may have increased. Also there has been an increased demand on covering school fees and school camps, an interesting point when school budgets are also picking up gaps for school camps.



Total Figure Breakdown is as follows:-

Item Type	2007/08 Amount \$	2006/07 Amount \$
2 <sup>nd</sup> Hand Books	21,357	18,280
2nd Hand Uniforms	5,296	8,934
New Books	26,824	25,910
New Uniforms	12,586	8,388
School Shoes	6,190	5,720
Fees / Book Hire	5,484	2,837
School Camps	2,885	1,202
Misc.	4,352	3,729
	<b>\$ 84,974</b>	<b>\$ 75,000</b>



The process and access to funding through CONCERN is managed very efficiently and professionally by dedicated and committed volunteers. These people provide an invaluable service and are an asset to the agency and the families they assist. The process for application although evaluated in this process is outside of the constraints of this report and will not be considered.



### UnitingCare Geelong / (PEX)

Although UnitingCare PEX has previously been managed in a slightly different manner and on a smaller scale, the following outlines the financial support provided to the families who have sought their assistance with education expenses.

In 2006 an allocation of \$5,000 was used towards education assistance which focused on primary schools in the local area, helping parents with costs associated with school camps, swimming lessons and school shoes.

During 2007 from the UnitingCare 'SHARE Community Appeal', \$15,000 was received to cover their Education Program, which was also used to assist local families with primary school students to access funding for school camps, swimming lessons, school shoes, and in some instances the cost of prescription glasses.

## Government

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The Australian Government, through the Council of Australian Government (COAG), is making a strong commitment to education through a number of commitments arising from 'The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century', to the '2020 Schools Summit', and a more recent conference of State, Territory, and Australian Government Ministers of education in December 2007.

The Government is suggesting that 'an education revolution' is underway, where a strong financial and social commitment is made to the Australian people, where schooling is considered to be the foundation of our economic and social strength. Education empowers individuals, creates social benefits, and helps build social capital, establishing Australia as one of the most highly educated and skilled nations.

A budget of \$19.3 billion in education investment has been delivered in the 2008/09 budget, demonstrating the Government's commitment to trade training centres, new digital technology and a national curriculum, where the central goals are to; build a stronger future, build a fairer Australia and prepare for future challenges, including greater civic participation, greater social cohesion, lower levels of crime and disadvantage, and a more trusting, equitable and just society. ('Quality Education: The case for an Education Revolution in our Schools', 27 August 2008). A commitment considered necessary to create an education revolution that will build a world class education system that will establish Australia as one of the most highly educated and skilled nations. That is if, "the gap between what is needed in education and what is provided by government is addressed", according to critics and Mary Bluett, from the Australian Education Union (The Age, 22 January 2007).

These commitments are flowing through to State and local levels where the State Government of Victoria through a fairer Victoria 2008: 'Strong People, Strong Communities', is also investing in a range of initiatives where social policy action plans to address disadvantage and promote inclusion and participation are established. This includes addressing the achievement gap, providing quality education, ensuring equality of opportunity, considering social inclusion or exclusion, welfare payments, and human rights implications, and are all being considered.

The Government's introduction of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and the once off School Start Up Bonus of \$300 offered to families of Prep and Year Seven students although helping, is still proving to be insufficient in covering the costs of education. The EMA has been established to assist families receiving welfare assistance. It is for school children under 16, and is restricted to those on welfare benefits, and is the main source of assistance for low income families; it is capped annually at \$215 for primary school students and \$430 for secondary students, and usually reduces the parent's choice of its allocation, because arrangements for the payment of the EMA money is usually split evenly between the school and the parents. Therefore, school principals are topping up school budgets and covering school fees before parents are able to provide students with full allocations of uniforms, text books and digital technology requirements (such as calculators, USBs, internet access, etc).

Although the introduction of new policies and initiatives are needed including better technology and trade training centres, they are resulting in additional financial pressures on families such as the need for internet access and USB devices, or even tools for tradesmen and apprentice chefs. This information is evident in the demand on welfare services and the funding still being distributed from agencies such as UnitingCare Geelong to families, even at Year Seven level.

Therefore in meeting the Government's objectives and commitments, political leaders will need to consider a whole of education approach and work with agencies and support groups on building solid foundations for schools (Johnson, 2008).

## Conclusion

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In considering the Government's budget commitments, the allocation of funding through EMA, the 'Schools Start Up Payments' and the continued demand on welfare and support agencies, it is clear that a gap still exists in covering the cost of education and responsibility requirements.

The Victorian Government may have made a significant investment over the past eight years to strengthen education, and may have embarked on a further process for school reform as included in their commitment contained in the Discussion Paper, 'Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform', but without acknowledging the social context and financial barriers that currently limit access to education, or that even exclude children from participating, ensuring an ongoing and meaningful education for all is going to be difficult to achieve.

From the discussions with the various schools and their welfare officers, bridging the gap between financial hardship and participation of those students who are most at risk of dropping out is critical for children in disadvantaged families. The State Government considers that engaging children and families in education delivers greater returns to communities, and assists in breaking down the intergenerational cycles of low school attainment rates, however the ongoing costs of the apparent 'free education' system is preventing this in a number of cases within the Geelong region.

From a freedom of information request by 'The Age' it was revealed that local communities have been and still are raising money to cover what principals, teachers and parents say is a shortfall in State Government funding, where Ms Bluett, President of the Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) states "the shortfalls led to enormous inequalities between schools in wealthy suburbs and those in Melbourne's west and drought affected rural communities, where few parents could afford to pay voluntary fees". Western Heights Secondary College in Geelong during 2006 has been considered in the top three schools raising \$2.01 million for 1,353 students, that is \$1,485 per student.

The research on funding allocations is continually demonstrating that the allocations of funding are insufficient to cover the expectations of the education system, not to mention additional curricula activities including camps, after school sports / activities and / or events where participatory involvement of individuals can affect the long term active citizenship role of an individual.

With the financial pressures back on families, it is no wonder that evidence-based research is indicating continual increases in funding needs from welfare agencies in the Geelong region. UnitingCare Geelong contributed in excess of \$80,000 in 2008 to families who are struggling to meet education costs; while many other welfare agencies such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Salvation Army and Smith Family are also experiencing the frustrations with funds only stretching so far.

Many agencies are seeing patterns and trends develop, particularly in disadvantaged communities of low incomes and single parent families, where the cycle of funding dependency continues, and where the opportunities to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage continue to be a challenge. Schools and welfare agencies are continually recognising the financial impacts on families; and they are desperately trying to implement strategies and flexible options to assist families with some of the challenges currently being faced. However, the opportunities to be proactive in planning and supporting families is becoming more and more limited, with the ongoing and increasing costs of living, not to mention the potential flow-on effects from the down turn in the financial market, closures and redeployment in the manufacturing industry and telecommunications in the Geelong region.

Schools are already offering payment plans, breakfast programs, access to second hand uniforms and books, and reducing cost camps or camp-ins, and in the provision of referral services. Budgets within welfare agencies are continually being stretched and are heavily reliant on grants. In addition, there is the continued need to maintain good relationships and partnerships with their local support groups, community fundraising organisers, and in some cases corporate sponsors. Overall, budgets are tight and pressures mount for families and agencies, and there is not a lot of relief in sight.

In considering the vast array of information gathered, both qualitative and quantitative, it is strongly recommended that this report be utilised as soon as possible, and to lobby and raise awareness of the impending issues currently being faced in the community. These include issues in relation to the 'access to education in low income families' and the broader links to everyone's right to experience human dignity, basic human rights, the well being of individuals, social inclusiveness and their connections in their community.

## **Areas For Further Consideration**

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In completing this report it was evident that there are a number of other considerations that would complement and expand the level of information in this report including:-

- ❖ Seeking further funding to complete more in-depth research and reports into accessing and covering the costs of education, including consultation and surveying of parents and students.
- ❖ Raising awareness of inequities in school programs.
- ❖ Understanding the impacts on the community in a more holistic view rather than just by suburb.
- ❖ Raising the profile and importance of education through ways that encourage and support people at the ground level.
- ❖ Providing ways for those students most at risk of dropping out for family reasons, to have greater assistance at the parent level.
- ❖ Raising the awareness of the intergenerational experiences.
- ❖ Emphasising the importance of after school activities, their participatory benefits to students, the community and the associated costs involved.
- ❖ Raising awareness of financial pressures on families and students.

- ❖ Expanding and educating schools on welfare services that are available, however noting that additional funding would then be required to support this.
- ❖ Looking at partnership projects with other agencies and government bodies on how to best address these issues and problems.
- ❖ Engaging with parents more on an equal basis.
- ❖ Developing a consolidated information program / package about welfare and funding support services.

## **In Terms of Education**

- ❖ Establishing what is considered to be an equitable level of learning experiences from excursions, swimming, camps, and other activities considered to be beneficial to the learning experiences of all students.
- ❖ Providing equal access to excursions, swimming, school activities and camps for all schools, and ensuring equivalent levels of experiences and access to learning through the development of a co-coordinated approach across all schools, that identifies as a minimum, the expected / recommended experiences to outside activities that can be funded from within school budgets.
- ❖ Increasing school budgets to cover the identified level of activities that have been agreed upon.
- ❖ Increasing the EMA allowance to ensure the costs of uniforms and books (including technology requirements) are covered to an agreed minimum level.
- ❖ Encouraging and supporting schools to implement strategies to maximize the purchasing, swapping or handing on of uniforms, and to minimize the cost of new uniforms.
- ❖ Developing strategies within departmental curriculum planning and at a school level, to minimize the changes in booklists to enable increased reuse or sale of second hand books.
- ❖ Looking at the timing of activities, including purchasing of uniforms, book needs and fee payments, in relation to often high cost times of the year (i.e. before and after Christmas).
- ❖ The impact of the built environment, including school infrastructure, and how and why this is impacting on student behaviour.

## **Transport**

Although transport was not a factor in the surveys or the discussions with welfare officers, it did raise concerns with some. These concerns included issues about the current petrol prices, single parent families, one car families, custody issues, distances to school, and public transport options. It should also be noted that in the northern suburbs of Geelong, one primary school has already closed, and another proposal to amalgamate nine other schools into five schools is also anticipated. In disadvantaged areas, the outcome of these proposed changes may already be having a dramatic impact on families where transport to school is already an issue. Therefore, consideration should start being given to:-

- ❖ Developing sustainable school transport options for disadvantaged families / students.

## **Nutrition**

Strong links between nutrition and learning abilities have been identified in many areas of research. Without providing healthy diets for children, the full extent of their learning abilities and concentration levels are compromised. This has been recognised by many schools, with individual schools introducing breakfast programs, fruit provision and lunch support, where the importance of nutrition for their students was clearly recognised. Schools within disadvantaged communities have noticed a higher need in this area than the more affluent communities.

Therefore, a component of funding should be available for the provision of healthy food relief in the way of breakfast and / or lunch programs as is needed.

## **Learning support**

From discussions with migrant families learning support is considered an area that is creating various challenges for families and children. Fitting in and adjusting to a new life for migrant families is already challenging enough, and accessing and finding additional support is often a very big challenge for those families. North Geelong Secondary College enrolls a number of migrant students, and has been successful in obtaining grants to assist these families; however the broader community is not necessarily receiving the support required to assist students. Other agencies such as Diversitat are providing support for tutoring services, however this is in a limited capacity, and waiting lists are in place.

Increasing resources and funding to support and encourage students from non English speaking backgrounds will enable catch-up learning for students, and assist them to break the cultural gap. It would also be beneficial to consider a referral process for families when they are new to areas, and are looking for schools and support.

## **Information Technology**

It was noted through the research that the level of information technology requirements for students varies from school to school and year level to year level. Some schools are providing computerised learning opportunities for students from Grade Prep, with the inclusion of computers in class rooms, and the operation of starboards for learning sessions, whilst other schools are minimizing access to computers in the class room, but expect a greater level of access to computers within the home or outside of the school environment. This may be acceptable for more affluent families with a home computer or those who are able to access a local library, however for many disadvantaged families this opportunity is limited, creating another challenge or barrier in the field of learning.

Even if the family does have a home computer, the ongoing cost of internet access is also creating another barrier for many families and students.

The expectations of students to have USB devices is another expense and pressure being worn by families, and in Geelong it is often being picked up by the Salvation Army. Discussions with the Salvation Army indicated this was a major area of concern and cost for families.

Strategies therefore could be developed within schools, and in partnerships for stimulating access and utilisation of computers in and out of school hours.

Looking for opportunities with local public libraries and community centres that can offer support and assistance to schools would help in reducing these costs, and / or in finding other ways to cover the costs of USBs.

## **Health and Well being**

The costs associated with hearing and vision needs (aides and glasses) are becoming an additional demand on welfare agencies. Without the provision of such items, the potential of students is being reduced where students are falling behind in class, making it difficult to catch up, and then often resulting in misbehaviour and or dropping out of school.

Access to healthy and fresh food is affecting the health and well being of many students and their learning abilities in lower socio economic areas. It is evident in many research papers that in lower socio economic areas, the number of take-away food options (such as McDonalds, Fish & Chips, KFC) is greater than in higher socio economic areas.

## Community Costs

Costs to the community such as vandalism, graffiti, crime and some levels of violence are also being considered higher in areas that experience higher levels of disadvantage. Identifying links between these costs and lower education attainment rates could be considered another area of pursuit.



## Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment



### ORGANISATIONS OPERATING IN GEELONG WHO CONTRIBUTED INFORMATION TO THIS REPORT

- Uniting Church
- UnitingCare Geelong
- Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment
- Geelong Community Foundation
- Smith Family
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Salvation Army
- Lions Club
- Rotary Club
- School Principals
- School Welfare Workers
- Parents and friends

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