



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL *good works*

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22 September 2011

Vinnies CEO discusses Catalyst-Clemente program on ABC AM

***Topics:** The benefits of the Catalyst-Clemente program that gives disadvantage people the opportunity to study Humanities at Australian Universities from the perspective of those involved- a former student, a professor and the St Vincent de Paul Society.*

PRESENTER, TONY EASTLEY: The Prime Minister has a soft spot for education initiatives and the organisers of a little known university program for the disadvantaged are hoping because of that she'll come good with some extra funding.

Just 450 people have enrolled in the Catalyst-Clemente program since it began eight years ago. But the organisers say it has consistently helped participants improve their health, financial security and employment prospects.

It's funded at the moment by charitable groups and universities. But it believes with more resources it could significantly help the most marginalised reconnect with society. Naomi Woodley has more.

REPORTER, NAOMI WOODLEY: John Lusty was a successful IT worker but almost a decade ago a battle with drugs left him unemployed and feeling isolated.

He successfully treated his addiction but finding a new job without recent work experience or references was a challenge.

JOHN LUSTY: I spent a couple of years trying really hard to get back into the workforce, going for any job I could. I was prepared to work for any amount of money and to travel anywhere. And you know I wasn't finding any opportunities.

REPORTER: He decided to enrol in the Catalyst-Clemente program. It's a free university course for people struggling with disadvantage and exclusion, be it homelessness, addiction, poor health or unemployment.

Run by Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul and a number of universities, the students study to complete a Certificate of Liberal Arts but can also get help with transport, housing and meals. John Lusty says it gave him more than an education.

JOHN LUSTY: In my case and I think in most people's cases they do the Clemente course over a two year period. So if you've stuck at a university course for two years and you've passed all subjects and you graduate that certainly helps speak to your reliability.

REPORTER: The course has been running since 2003 but for the first time its results have been assessed. A survey of 59 students found that at the start of the program 79 per cent had experienced homelessness and 87 per cent were living on government benefits. But Dr John Falzon from St Vincent de Paul says the snapshot shows improvements across the board.

DR JOHN FALZON: [The program] increased their sense of belonging, their sense of feeling part of the community, their health status. And even in some cases it has had quite tangible results as far as preparing the way for paid employment.

REPORTER: The Australian Catholic University is one of the course providers. Professor Jude Butcher says the program helps students feel more involved in their community.

PROFESSOR JUDE BUTCHER: So the university is in their world. In many ways it's like the University of the Streets.

REPORTER: Dr John Falzon says if the government is serious about addressing disadvantage it should be looking at this type of program rather than some of its existing policies.

DR JOHN FALZON: It's certainly the opposite to the approach typified by compulsory income management which takes people's power away and their sense of self-worth. This program is all about people being able to tap in to their own inherent dignity as human beings and as citizens of this country.

REPORTER: And as for John Lusty he graduated last year and is now happily working for St Vincent de Paul in Canberra.

TONY EASTLEY: Naomi Woodley reporting.

ENDS

Every day in Australia the Society helps many thousands of people through Home Visitations, Migrant and Refugee Assistance, Hospital Visitation, Aged and Special Care Service, Retail Centres, Sheltered Workcentres, Hostels for Homeless Men, Women and Children, Overseas Relief, Disaster Recovery, Budget Counselling and Youth Programs.