

# Challenges to social inclusion are being illuminated in the era of social distancing

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## Editorial

The year 2020 is like no other. The Covid-19 pandemic spread across the world, and with it shone a spotlight on long entrenched social inequalities and associated differences in our abilities to 'socially distance' and prepare for and endure enforced 'lockdowns'. As Xafis (2020) puts it, those most affected by the pandemic "are individuals and groups routinely disadvantaged by the social injustice created by the misdistribution of power, money, and resources" (p. 1). Differences in health and disability status, ability to access care, occupational status, wealth, education, housing, food security, and cultural background, have all been attributed to differences in coronavirus mortality and morbidity rates (Xafis, 2020).

The death of a teenager with cerebral palsy left without a carer after his relatives in China were quarantined due to the coronavirus outbreak (Standaert, 2020), speaks of one traumatic story in which intersecting misdistributions culminate. The disproportionate number of African-Americans affected by Covid-19 and the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police ignited a powder keg of unrest in the United States; fuelling the 'Black Lives Matter' movement even further, and its spread across the globe (Almasy, Andone, Karimi, & Sidner, 2020; Leicester & Jordans, 2020; Sanchez, 2020). Australia's First Nation peoples, and allies from all cultural backgrounds, also took to the streets with their face masks to highlight systematic injustice – the over-representation of the incarceration of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders (Murphy, 2020).

The world has indeed been thrust into unprecedented upheaval and change as a result of this pandemic. The social and economic inequalities that it more starkly reveals impact on our ability to foster inclusion and continue to highlight injustices. For instance, people in the most disadvantaged suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, have seen a disproportionate burden of infringements issued for failure to comply with social distancing requirements, and half of the cases diagnosed in the 'second wave' are from the city's most socioeconomically disadvantaged suburbs (Briggs, 2020; Cooper, 2020). Our leaders will be key as to whether we end up lessening or further widening the inequities that to date, appear to have become more entrenched (Xafix, 2020).

In Australia and elsewhere, not everyone was able to 'panic buy', hoard toilet paper, or has had secure housing to isolate at home. In response, shops began to open earlier to help ensure exclusive access to those most vulnerable, including the elderly and people with disabilities (Masige, 2020). The Australian government also announced a temporary doubling of welfare payments in response to the dramatic surge in unemployment rates; with women and younger casual workers disproportionately affected (Riberio, 2020). Calls to domestic and family violence service centres markedly increased in Australia and across the globe (Ackerman, 2020; Kehoe, 2020), and international university students in Australia relied on charities for food in the absence of being able to work or access financial support; instead being encouraged to return to their home countries (Rafferty, 2020). This edition of JOSI will contribute to debate and discussion of related issues of injustice while also highlighting some inclusive practice approaches.

The first paper in this issue by Hills, Clapton, Dorsett, and Andersen contributes an important,

interesting, and detailed account about the methodology of conducting interviews with people diagnosed with Level 3 ('nonverbal') autism and who require augmentative communication devices to be able to participate in the research and be heard for almost the first time. There are next to no studies capturing their lived experiences, nor in relation to spirituality which was the study's focus. The methodology is true to the mantra 'nothing about us, without us'. Heartening excitement is expressed and captured at being asked about their own experiences, as just one outcome of a methodology committed to ethical research principles and practices. A collaborative bricolage approach was used, alongside the support for autonomy, trust, sensitivity, inclusion, agency, and empowerment, and diligence with regards to authenticity and reliability. The energy levels of the participants dictated the length of the interviews, and the ensuing reminder for a flexible open approach, together work to fill a long-silent gap about otherwise voiceless members of our society.

Out of long-standing connections developed with medical practitioners in India, Larmar reports on the results of a small but important qualitative study about the delivery of compassionate care to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA). Using semi-structured and culturally sensitive interview questions with six medical staff, it was found that despite significant stigma and discrimination typically incurred within the home, at work, and among family and community, there is evidence that government campaigns are beginning to improve awareness about the disease. It was also found that despite serious resource and geographic challenges, clients were responding to the services' values for and enactment of self-determination and dignity. With their respectful 'open door' policy, clients were showing signs of hope, trust, disease management, and ongoing treatment. Particularly telling of the effectiveness of a compassionate approach to service delivery among this highly marginalised group was the uptake of counselling services; unique in a society where shame normally works to continue their silence. The use of a qualitative approach helped capture the lived experiences of those driven to provide compassionate care against all odds.

Richards, Oudshoorn, and Misener make an important contribution to the literature on homelessness. Specifically, they acknowledge gendered differences in the experience of homelessness and of sport participation. For women, risk of homelessness is associated with risk to their and their family's safety and is less visible in society and in the statistics. Presumptions about their interest in sport also affect their participation, despite it being a potentially useful vehicle of social inclusion. Based in Canada, the study shows that poverty is the key source of social exclusion for them as community networks can be powerful protective factors against lack of housing, and that purposeful recruitment into sporting activities within homelessness shelters can help mitigate against both passive recruitment strategies and gendered stereotypes about sport at large. This paper is important for its peering into intersectionality within the homelessness population to help ensure their needs and experiences are not homogenised, and call for even further peering into the roles of race, disability, and sexuality. These are critical future endeavours the paper highlights, along with the call for a universal basic income.

The article by Collinson examines the relationship between public health and social exclusion, and in particular, the lack of access to health services for people living on the margins of society around the world. Collinson discusses numerous health inequalities including for people who are homeless and for undocumented migrants in the context of the United Kingdom, but it is the discussion of how urban planning and architecture has evolved over time which is particularly novel to consider in the context of the current global pandemic. Although the paper identifies tuberculosis as the 'barometer' of health and social inequalities, the argument could also be made that the spread of Covid-19 in over-crowded, urban high rise developments around the world, underscores the importance of local planning, urban design and architecture as a structural determinant of health and wellbeing.

Marshall presents a compelling discussion regarding the need to shift the balance of power as a pre-requisite for collective impact initiatives and moreover, the central importance of critical reflection in achieving this. In his doctoral study, Marshall has used a theoretical framework based on complexity science and systems theory to examine and reconstruct power relationships involved in community work as part of collective impact approaches to improving wellbeing. The discussion is enriched by a deep understanding and application of relevant theories, however, manages to distil or clearly identify the factors that both inhibit and enable intersectoral and collective impact approaches. Moreover, the article discusses key implications for collective impact work, in particular, for the workforce tasked with implementing collective impact approaches. This includes a major focus on professional learning for critical inquiry and reflective practices in order to enable emancipatory approaches and affect social change.

The final article in this edition is a book review by Coombes of 'Music, Health and Wellbeing: Exploring Music for Health Equity and Social Justice' as edited by Sunderland, Bendrups and Bartleet (2018). As the reviewer, Coombes is a music therapist and academic from the United Kingdom, who before registering as a music therapist in 2000 was a community musician for Community Music Wales, in South Wales. In endorsing the book, she acknowledges that both her personal and professional experiences have shaped her beliefs in the wide-ranging impacts of music and music-making. Nevertheless, she offers some balance in her critique of this discussion of how music can be viewed through the frame of the social determinants of health and positive psychology, and its various benefits for people with mental illness, autism, and other diverse populations including rural people in Indonesia and Indigenous Australians.

To conclude, although health impacts have been a common focus of this issue of the *Journal of Social Inclusion*, it is acknowledged that the articles featured in this edition were submitted before the world routinely came to speak about, and do, 'social distancing'. Nevertheless, our contributors continue to illuminate some of the important issues this *Journal* is dedicated to giving coverage to and representation of. To this end, we hope you enjoy reading and learning from scholars around the world who contribute their knowledge, acumen, and creativity from a wide range of areas with the aim of promoting social inclusion.

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