There is no doubt that the Australian economy has become more efficient at producing a variety of the sort of things that people want to buy, at a relatively low cost. This is good for people as consumers. But it has achieved this success at the expense of people as workers, parents and citizens. Our economic life is now harsher, more pressured, less forgiving of any shortcomings, more unequal, more insecure. Our very effective economic machine is taking us efficiently in the wrong direction.

Professors Fiona Stanley, Sue Richardson & Margot Prior
Children of the Lucky Country (2005: 107-108)

Our society is not doing nearly well enough in translating our unprecedented economic freedom and prosperity into good outcomes for children.

Professors Sue Richardson and Margot Prior
No Time To Lose (2005)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Berry Street was founded in inner Melbourne in 1877 to provide refuge and care for children orphaned, living in poverty, neglected, deserted and sometimes abused.

Throughout human history the environments in which children grow up have shaped their experience of childhood (Aries, 1962). The early settlements in Australian colonies were harsh and brutal for children, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Whatever the intentions of Australia's colonisers, colonisation was a violent process that damaged centuries upon centuries of Indigenous family kinship and child rearing practices. Colonisation changed childhood forever for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Janet McCalman, the historian for Victoria's Royal Women's Hospital, traced the lives of 100 children whose mothers were admitted to the hospital during a three month period in 1886, soon after the founding of Berry Street. Thirty eight of these children died before they were two years of age, and only 12 children out of the original 100 are known to have reached adulthood (McCalman, 2005). Even the best of parental care was no match for dirty water, open drains and malnutrition.

However a century later it was a very different story. By the end of the twentieth century Australia was a wealthy and technologically advanced society. It was stable, well governed and peaceful, secured by strong institutions in parliamentary and executive government, an independent judiciary, and a diverse civil society.

The resultant changes to the experience of childhood and adolescence were remarkable. Science and modern medicine had transformed the story of pregnancy and birth. Infant welfare services, pre-schools, early childhood services, family allowances and other supports for families all contributed to the experience of a very different childhood. Free secular education for all children, and pathways into employment for school leavers as well as university graduates, were keys to an egalitarian society. Up until the late 1980's most children, even those who grew up in troubled families and had disrupted lives could get a full-time job. They would generally work alongside good natured adults who gave them a helping hand into the grown up world. And at last, but very slowly, the nation seemed to be recognising the harm and trauma colonisation had occasioned on Indigenous children.

The post Second World War decades in Australia have been called the golden years of childhood. When the country celebrated the new millennium the expectation was that Australia would continue to be a great place to be a child. However, by the end of the first decade a less positive and optimistic picture of some aspects of childhood had begun to emerge.

In this paper Berry Street sets out to explore why the majority of today's children are flourishing, while the wellbeing of an increasing number of others appears to be in decline. The paper will briefly introduce snapshots of the evidence which suggest that more children are not experiencing a good childhood. It will then discuss some of the underlying conditions in Australian society which may be contributing to the decline in the wellbeing of children. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of these changes.

To accompany this work we have also released a paper highlighting that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children our discussion of how childhood is changing needs to commence with an understanding of the impact of colonisation. Childhood as experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children today may in fact be much improved compared to the childhood Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experienced when the violence and dispossession of colonisation was at its zenith during the 18th and 19th centuries. Unquestionably Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should be at the centre of our current efforts to improve childhood for all children.

Berry Street is, and always has been, an organisation focused on service to children, young people and families. It is not an 'expert' on the history and science of childhood, nor is it in command of the extensive evidence and analysis of the changing conditions of contemporary childhood. Australia is well provided with research institutes and universities focused on these questions. Rather this paper emerges from the reality and urgency of Berry Street's day to day work with children, young people and families. After 130 years of service

Berry Street is of the view that the problems many families, children and young people face today require a broader consideration than the customary 'problem by problem' and 'case by case' approaches to protecting a good childhood. The issues at stake here include, but go beyond, improving early childhood services, the need to reform child protection practice, and the need to increase the range and quality of out of home care.

This paper explores the possibility that today's *conditions and experience of childhood* are changing in ways which need to be identified, understood and confronted.

PART 1: IS A GOOD CHILDHOOD AT RISK?

(1) THE EARLY WARNINGS

Late in 2003 Professor Fiona Stanley, one of Australia's best known scientists, an expert in childhood, and passionate advocate for children and particularly Indigenous children, was appointed Australian of the Year. To the surprise of many she used this honour to report on disturbing trends in the health and wellbeing of children. Most of the indicators of risk identified in this paper and many others were first identified by Professor Stanley earlier in the first decade of this century.

The core of her message, based on rigorous empirical epidemiological research, was that on many important indicators, the health and wellbeing of today's children was not on the rise but in decline. Increasing numbers of early twenty-first century children were known to have complex diseases such as asthma, diabetes, and eating disorders. In particular psychological problems such as learning disorders, depression and anxiety appeared to be increasing. Fiona Stanley reported there had been no improvements in the number of children born prematurely or underweight or diagnosed with physical or intellectual disabilities, and there had been dramatic increases in behaviour disorders especially attention deficit disorders (ADHD), hyperactivity, and substance abuse in young people. Increasing problems in schools, alongside declining educational achievement and truancy were reported across all States. Child protection notifications had been rapidly increasing for some years.

After her term as Australian of the Year, Fiona Stanley, together with Professors Sue Richardson and Margot Pryor, published a book called *Children of the Lucky Country: How Australia Has Turned its Back on Children* (2005). In this book they said:

> There is no doubt that the Australian economy has become more efficient at producing a variety of the sort of things that people want to buy, at a relatively low cost. This is good for people as consumers. But it has achieved this success at the expense of people as workers, parents and citizens. Our economic life is now harsher, more pressured, less forgiving of any shortcomings, more unequal, more insecure. Our very effective economic machine is taking us efficiently in the wrong direction. (Stanley, Richardson & Prior, 2005: 107-108)

In the same year, Sue Richardson and Margot Prior also published *No Time To Lose* (Richardson & Prior, 2005), which represented the findings and analyses of significant Australian researchers and analysts about the changing experience of childhood and concluded that 'our society is not doing nearly well enough in translating our unprecedented economic freedom and prosperity into good outcomes for children' (2005: 308).

Similar trends were reported in the United States (U.S.) and the United Kingdom (U.K.). In 2006 Sue Palmer, an English early childhood educator, published a book called *Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging our Children and What We Can Do About It.* Palmer (2006) drew particular attention to the emotional and mental wellbeing of children, the rise of special needs children in the U.K., especially those with ADHD, learning difficulties, dyslexia, and autistic spectrum disorders, and a range of mental health disorders particularly involving depression and anxiety.

Sue Palmer (2006) argued that a series of interrelated forces were changing our world so quickly that we all find it difficult to adapt and keep up. She stresses there is no one single culprit — it is the *interrelationships* between these changes which are critical. These changes include:
- Poor diet
- Lack of exercise
- Too much time indoors
- Insufficient sleep
- Less parental attachment in infancy
- The amount of adult talk to children and the manner in which they do so
- The reduction of children's firsthand experience of the world, which is now increasingly experienced through an electronic screen

- Inconsistency of child care
- Inappropriate role models
- A lowered level of emotional security
- Reduced social interaction within the family
- Weakening parental confidence about parenting, and
- Declining expectation that we all take responsibility for children.

What distinguishes the research of these particular writers about childhood is that they are not focused on particular problems and their specific causes and effects, but on a range of issues and changes which they believe are impacting negatively on the experience of childhood. In addition, they identify factors which are unique to our age—that is changes to childhood that are happening so fast that we can barely identify them and their effects before the children involved have grown into adolescence and adulthood. The pace of technological, economic and social change means that sometimes 'it is only when things emerge as problems that we really understand them' (Cubitt, 2010).

Traditionally most of the professions and services involved with children's health, safety and wellbeing have been focused on particular domains or parts of children's lives, such as their physical health, mental health, protection in the family and community, their learning and so on. They reference the expert disciplinary knowledge which explains these domains and problems and guides them to interventions and solutions. However, an increasing number of children at risk in twenty-first century Australia, and their families, experience problems not just in one domain of their lives but in a number of domains simultaneously. As a consequence, understanding these complex interrelated problems requires understanding of multiple and interrelated causes and effects. Increasingly the professions, governments and service providers are recognising this reality and reaching the inevitable conclusion that their responses will have to be different from those of the past.

So is Berry Street. Together with other service providers over the past decade, we have engaged in increasingly complex service responses to the issues facing children and families.

(2) CHANGES TO CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Overall the health and wellbeing of Australia's children has improved on a number of indicators over the past three decades, particularly with respect to physical health and economic wellbeing. These trends are documented on a systematic basis by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (for example in *A Picture of Australia's Children, 2009*; in *Headline Indicators for children's health, development and wellbeing, 2011c*; and in *Young Australians: their health and wellbeing 2011a)*. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2008) publishes national reports (such as the *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2007*)*;* as does the Australian Institute of Family Studies*;* and the University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre (for example the *State of Australia's Young People* report by Muir and colleagues prepared for the Australian Office of Youth).

At State level, many agencies also document the state of children. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development reports on a number of indicators of health and wellbeing in its annual report *The state of Victoria's children* (2009; 2010; 2011). These reports generally demonstrate steady improvement on the indicators of physical health and economic wellbeing.

By the end of the first decade of this century however a number of voices were joining those of Stanley, Prior and Richardson (2005), and Palmer (2006) and raising questions about other critical indicators such as the mental health and emotional lives of children, and some of the societal changes impacting on their lives. In the late 1990s, Richard Eckersley from the Australian National University was identifying issues of concern about the mental health and wellbeing of young people, later identified by Fiona Stanley (Stanley, Richardson & Prior, 2005) and Sue Palmer (2006).

In 2010 the Australian Medical Association felt compelled to report that:

> Overall the health status of Australian children has improved over the past few decades as demonstrated by decreases in the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases and infant mortality

rates. However on measures of developmental wellbeing such as mental health and obesity, our children and young people have demonstrated a significant deterioration in outcomes. (Australian Medical Association, 2010:1)

In 1997 the Australian Bureau of Statistics *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing* found that 14% of Australia's children and youth between the ages of 4-17 had a mental disorder (as reported by Sawyer et al, 2001). A decade later this same survey found that 26% of young people now aged 16-24 years of age had a mental disorder, which included substance disorders. The figure for the general population was 20%. In 2009, Muir and colleagues from the Social Policy Research Centre reported that 40% of young people aged 16-24 had experienced a mental disorder at some point in their lives (2009).

It is difficult to define precisely what these findings and changes mean in terms of the contemporary experience of childhood. Australia does not have long term historical studies which track changes in the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Most researchers acknowledge that when it comes to mapping mental health conditions over time it has to be recognised that their definition, recognition and identification change.

Also, it is important to take into account the impacts of a wide range of environmental changes when trying to analyse and understand fluctuations in the mental health and wellbeing of children. Too often, reports on single factors such as increases in alcohol consumption, obesity or self-harm are presented as stand-alone markers of change in the experience of childhood. Such explanations may distort the story and encourage governments and professionals to adopt single and often narrow program or service responses. Such interventions are, of course, easier to advocate for, fund and implement, but in the medium to long term may be ineffectual. As Palmer (2006) pointed out, it is the complex interaction of a number of different changes which we need to understand, rather than dealing with very specific problems one by one.

In this context, Professor Patrick Parkinson from the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney (former Chair of the Family Law Council) set out to document a detailed analysis of the state of the nation's children in a report for the Australian Christian Lobby entitled *For Kids' Sake* (Parkinson, 2011). Parkinson traces patterns of change across a range of indicators of the wellbeing of children and young people. *For Kids' Sake* is based on the findings of many independent peer reviewed research studies and reliable and rigorous government agency reports. Parkinson sees children as the 'canaries in the cage' of today's technologically advanced western economies, having to adapt to unprecedented shifts in the speed and volatility of progress and change.

For Kids' Sake, drawing on extensive reports and research papers, finds significant adverse changes in:

- Child abuse, neglect and exploitation
- Psychological distress
- Self-harm and suicide
- Binge drinking
- Risky sexual behaviour, leading to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted sex, and teenage pregnancy, and
- Rates of juvenile offending.

Parkinson (2011) argues that these problems and their increasing incidence and prevalence are interrelated, rather than separate and distinct changes in young people's behaviour. For example, drawing on Cashmore (2011), Bender (2010) and other sources, he finds that as the extent of child maltreatment is increasing and adolescent mental health is declining, juvenile offending (especially among young women) is also increasing. The *only* juvenile problem Parkinson finds to be in decline is illicit drug use, although this finding needs to be considered alongside a considerable increase in young people's use and abuse of alcohol (Parkinson, 2011).

Parkinson's findings are consistent with Berry Street's extensive, direct and long-term experience with young people, particularly, but not only, those living in out of home care. The prevalence and *severity* of mental health issues, learning problems, substance abuse and offending behaviour in the young people served has increased markedly over the past two decades. Parkinson concludes that not only has there been 'a significant decline in adolescent emotional wellbeing in the last decade or so' (2011:44), but traditional responses to this

trend, which involve specific, intensive and generally short-term programs for one particular problem, divert attention from the greater problem, which Parkinson calls the 'deterioration in the social environment generally' (Parkinson, 2011:44).

Berry Street is reluctant to draw causal conclusions about changes in the Australian social environment and the apparent decline in the wellbeing of many children. And Parkinson reminds his readers that correlations do not translate into causation. However, these changes in childhood, and the broader societal changes which may drive them, are consistent with the wide ranging analysis of Stanley, Richardson and Pryor in *Children of the Lucky Country: How Australia Has Turned its Back on Children* (2005) and Palmer in *Toxic Childhood* (2006).

Parkinson (2011) makes detailed reference to one long term American study which may have sufficient rigour to support the view that the emotional wellbeing of young people is in decline. Twenge et al (2010) published a very comprehensive analysis of data collected over 69 years from cohorts of college students who, at the same stage of their undergraduate degree, completed the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The researchers found that each generation of students from 1938 to 2007 experienced poorer mental health than the previous one. By 2007, five times as many students as in 1938 experienced a range of mental health problems, and on many of these measures the changes were dramatic.

Significantly these increases were present even though the researchers controlled for the changes arising from the greater readiness of the students to be *free* to acknowledge mental health problems and be *able* to identify the symptoms tested by the MMPI. Further, on the basis of the numbers of Americans known to be taking psychotropic medications and the growing proportion of college students taking medication and controlling their symptoms, the researchers concluded that the findings may actually underestimate the progressive decline of mental health and wellbeing. A smaller study of high school students found similar results for the period between 1985 and 2002 (Twenge et al, 2010). In both studies, the changes were consistent despite different highs and lows in the U.S. economy.

Of course, reference to overseas studies should not be considered conclusive in the Australian context, but they may help inform trends in Australia.

(3) RISING CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Significant indicators which suggest a decline in the wellbeing of an increasing number of children over the past two decades include the rise of notifications and substantiations of child abuse and neglect, increased demand for out of home care, and increased reports of family violence. These changes are documented and reported on a systematic basis by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the National Child Protection Clearing House, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and relevant State departments.

Abuse, neglect and trauma experienced in early childhood can significantly influence the development of the brain, considerably more so than in adulthood. With 80% of the brain's major structural changes occurring during the first four years of life, 'traumatic experiences that take place during this critical window impact the brain in multiple areas and can actually change the structure and function of key neural networks, including those involved with regulating stress and arousal' (Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010:29).

In addition, it is now well established that an increasing proportion of the families coming into contact with child protection services now have multiple and complex problems which impact more adversely on children (Allen Consulting Group, 2003; Bromfield et al, 2010; Ford, 2007; Jacob & Fanning, 2006).

Jacob and Fanning summarised this change in Tasmania as follows:

> Evidence was provided that child protection work has become increasingly complex with the families involved likely to present with an array of intertwined and long standing issues, many of which are related to poverty. Families involved with child protection services face many challenges and difficulties with increased numbers of parents with housing issues, psychiatric illness, serious problems of drug and alcohol abuse and experience of domestic violence and marriage breakdown. (Jacob & Fanning, 2006:68)

While these changes still refer to a small proportion of all Australia's children, they have been of sufficient concern to engage the National Government in these issues for the first time since Federation. In 2009 the Council of Australian Governments released a report *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009-2020* (COAG, 2009)*.*

Between 1999 and 2009 national child protection notifications increased from a total of 103,000 to 339,000 (AIHW, 2011b; Parkinson, 2011:17). The number of children in out of home care in Australia doubled, not only from an increase in orders by the courts, but because children were remaining in out of home care for extended periods of time. This change is indicative of the reduced capacity and readiness of their families to be able to take them back into their care, and the readiness of these children to return home (AIHW, 2011b; Cummins et al, 2012; Parkinson, 2011:22). In its most recent report on child protection statistics, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2011b) indicated that despite the overall growth in out of home care over the last decade, the capacity of this system to respond to need is not increasing as rapidly as the numbers of orders made by children's courts for substitute care. For organisations like Berry Street this means that the out of home care services are under constant pressure, possibly returning children to their families too early, or having to place children in services not according to their needs but according to what vacancies are available.

Probably the most confronting findings from recent research are those of the report of the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* (Cummins et al, 2012). The number of children who were the subject of a report of concern each year in the state of Victoria increased by 49% between 2000 and 2011, and the report rate of children aged 0-17 increased from 25.5 to 33.5 children per 1000 per annum. The Inquiry found that if this rate of increase was to continue, one out of four children born in 2011 will be the subject of a report by the time they are 18 years of age (Cummins et al, 2012:Lxvi).

At the same time as these changes were taking place, similar patterns were emerging with respect to family violence, formerly called domestic violence. In Victoria, the fastest growing category of assault, including street crimes, is family violence (Victoria Police, 2011). Between 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, reported family violence assaults increased by 15%, and in the five year period between 2006-07 and 2010-11 the overall increase was 38% (Victoria Police, 2011). And between 2010-11 and 2011-12 there was a rise in family violence-related crime of 39.9% (Victoria Police, 2012). Of course, not all these instances involved children, but more recent figures indicate that a high proportion of them do involve children in a variety of ways.

In 2004, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation found the highest contributor to death, illness and disability for women from 15-44 years of age was intimate partner violence (VicHealth, 2004). In 2011-12 there were 50,382 incidents where police submitted family incident reports (Victoria Police, 2012), and the significance of these figures must be considered in the light of the Australian Bureau of Statistics finding that over 60% of instances of family violence were not reported (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006:21). Overall, the rate of violence in the home has been increasing at an even greater pace than notifications of abuse and neglect of children.

A common question which arises from these changes is whether increases in child abuse and neglect notifications and family violence reports represent increased awareness, better service responses and greater confidence that complaints will be dealt with; and/or whether there are 'real' increases in child abuse and family violence in Australian homes. Implicit in the former view is the belief that these problems have always been present at these levels, but now we recognise them and confront them.

Berry Street is not in a position to answer this question. Accurately analysing trends in child protection and family violence figures involves complexities associated with population growth, increased awareness, changing state approaches to classifying and investigating events, and different interpretations of the impacts of policies and interventions. Inevitably increased awareness and improved service responsiveness are part of the story, but *even* if they are the full story, they do not explain why in contemporary society after more than 20 years of growing awareness and improved interventions, we are not approaching the point where the frequency and severity of these problems have begun to decline. There appears to be an inescapable reality manifest here — despite Australia's economic wealth and prosperity, advances in our professional knowledge, accessible services, and improved reporting and services   over the past two decades, *the presentation of problems experienced by children continues to increase and some are increasing very significantly.* At Berry

Street we believe whatever the basis of these changes, they further support the conclusions of Stanley, Prior and Richardson (2005) that Australia has been unable to translate its economic growth, prosperity and technological progress into good outcomes for all families and children.

(4) SCHOOLING BECOMES UNEQUAL

> High-quality schooling fosters the development of creative, reformed and resilient citizens who are able to participate fully in a dynamic and globalised world. It also leads to many benefits for individuals and society, including higher levels of employment and earnings, and better health, longevity, tolerance and social cohesion. (Gonski et al, 2011: xiii)

In many countries, education performance varies significantly between students from high and low socioeconomic groups (Argy, 2007) and this variance is thought to be connected to unequal access to opportunities and resources in the education sector. Although Australia has had some positive improvements in education, parents' educational background and socioeconomic status remain strongly connected with student performance (OECD, 2012). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a system of international assessments focusing on the reading, mathematics and science literacy of 15 year olds, has shown that on average, Australian students from the lowest socioeconomic group are almost three years behind students from the highest socio-economic group (Thomson et al, 2011). PISA gives us many examples of educational inequities in Australia based on socioeconomic status, including:

- Across all literacy domains, higher levels of socioeconomic background equated to higher student performance
- Only 4% of students from the lowest socioeconomic quartile performed at the higher end of the reading literacy proficiency scale, in comparison to 25% of students in the highest socioeconomic quartile.

Aside from socioeconomic status being associated with inequity in schooling, other significant associations as found by PISA include geographic location and race (Thomson et al, 2011). PISA assessments comparing Australian students in remote and metropolitan schools found students in remote schools to be approximately one and a half years behind metropolitan students.

Indigenous students were found to be disadvantaged in the schooling system. The data presented by PISA indicates that on average, Indigenous students' level of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy were two years behind that of non-Indigenous students, with the Indigenous reading literacy average being lower than the OECD average (Thomson et al, 2011).

The stark contrasts and inequities faced by students who are in a low socioeconomic bracket, geographically isolated, or Indigenous, indicate that '(t)he education system is not acting to produce more equitable outcomes, but is instead reinforcing educational privilege where it exists by conferring higher scores and denying privilege where it does not already exist' (Thomson et al, 2011:18). This is a significant issue that flows into other inequities, such as employment inequality (Argy, 2007).

It seems that the inequity in schooling begins from an early age. In Australia, participation rates in, and public funding for, early childhood education are relatively low when compared with other OECD countries (OECD, 2012). Not only does Australia rank 32nd out of 34 OECD countries on early childhood educational indicators, we also rank 34th out of 38 in enrolment rates for early childhood education.

Whilst we cannot underestimate the significance of educational inequity in Australia and the devastating impacts that it can have on disadvantaged children and young people throughout their lifespan, it is also important to acknowledge that this inequity is not new, and that it is in fact lessening. PISA records indicate that although we still have a long way to go, we are working towards minimising the inequity of our education system:

> In the PISA 2009 International report, Australia's overall performance in reading literacy was described as "High Quality – Low Equity", meaning that while the overall scores in reading literacy were higher than the OECD average, the impact of socioeconomic status was also higher than the OECD average. For this cycle, Australia is still a High Quality country, having

above average performance, and average impact of socioeconomic background, so Average Equity. (Thomson et al, 2011:20)

(5) DECLINING PARTICIPATION IN FULL-TIME WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Young people's education and labour force participation over the past three decades has been characterised by increased rates of school retention, increased participation in post-secondary education and increased part-time work. These changes have been of great benefit to many teenagers and young people, allowing them to balance longer periods of education with work and prepare for very different labour markets from those experienced by their parents.

As a consequence, the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) reports that over the past 25 years, full-time work for teenagers (15-19 years) has declined by 20%, while part-time work has increased substantially (FYA, 2012). The picture for young adults (20-24 years) also reflects a decline in full-time work. In the mid-1980s 64.3% of young adults were in full-time work, and now the figure is 43.6% (FYA, 2012:35). During these 25 years, full-time education for young adults has increased markedly from 7% to 31%, and part-time employment has also grown substantially. However, the downside of this picture is that by 2012 at least 25% of young adults, and probably many more, were neither in full-time work nor full-time education (FYA, 2012:35).

Berry Street considers this radical rewriting of the longstanding story of the transition from childhood to adulthood is of great significance, and has been very problematic for young people from disadvantaged communities and families who do not remain at school and move on to tertiary education. While the above changes have opened up opportunities for many young people, the lack of opportunity for, or deferral of, full-time work has been disastrous for vulnerable school leavers. Full-time, secure, testing and respected work has been critical to young people's successful transition into the economy and an independent and self-respecting adulthood. As a consequence, the working futures of one out of five, and in disadvantaged areas up to one out of three teenagers and young adults, are marked by the very features they do not need—unemployment, casual or part-time work, rapid changes, insecurity, reduced quality of the work experience, limited and/or minimalist training and a reinforcement of the sense of themselves as on the margins of our society and economy.

While this shift has been going on since the 1980s, it became more significant in the volatile years of the 1990s. In 1998 the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, in partnership with seven leading national research organisations, produced a report entitled *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk*, drawing together a comprehensive picture of the learning and working circumstances of 15-19 year olds in the 1990s. This independent study revealed '…that the shadow of marginalisation engulfing 15-19 year old Australians is larger than generally understood and growing' (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1998:5).

In the context of significant increases in school retention and post-secondary full-time education, the report notes the following changes in the 1990s:

- the rates of full-time employment for teenagers fell in the 1990s, over and above the already declining rates in the 1970s and 1980s
- there was an increase in the numbers of school leavers in insecure work not linked to training and education, and
- after a period of improving school retention, there had been a decline in school retention during the 1990s which coincided with a fall in full-time employment opportunities.

The Forum reports that overall the 1990's saw a significant rise in the number of teenagers who were not studying and who were working part-time, many in casual short-term jobs with minimal training. For example, the number of 15-19 year old full-time and part-time workers receiving in-house training halved between 1989 and 1993, falling from 147,000 to 65,999 (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1998).

Significantly this marginalisation continued during the first ten years of this century, escalating after the Global Financial Crisis. The Foundation for Young Australians has monitored these twenty-first century changes in

annual reports entitled *How Young People Are Faring*. The Foundation sees these changes for young people in a broader global context, noting that 'the economic, social and political turbulence currently being experienced in many parts of the world, such as Europe and the U.S., has had a devastating effect on the young'. Despite Australia's stronger economy and greater stability relative to Europe and the US, the Foundation reports that *'since 2008 the percentage of young Australians without a job for a year or more has almost doubled'* (FYA, 2011:6). Opportunities for full-time work have 'sharply declined' and mobility in full and part-time work is high with nearly one in five teenagers changing their job status every month during 2011.

At the end of 2012, a total of 73.4% of 15-19 year olds were in full-time education, 12.2% were in full-time work and of the remaining 14.4%, most were unemployed, or not in the employment market, or in some form of part-time work. During 2011 the unemployment rate for teenagers was nearly 16%, down from 18% in 2010, but it increased slightly to 16.6% in 2012 (FYA, 2012a:3). For every one teenager officially unemployed, the Foundation for Young Australians estimates another one is either not registered for work or working part-time and seeking full-time work. In addition, the overall stability and tenure of full-time work has also declined and part-time work is no longer a sure stepping stone to full-time employment, as only slightly more teenagers are likely to move from part-time to full-time jobs as are those who are unemployed (FYA, 2011:11).

The pattern changes for young adults aged between 20-24, with 31.3% in full-time education and 43.6% in full-time work. But of the remaining 25%, 11.5% were in some form of part-time work and 13.7% were unemployed or not engaged in either work or education (FYA, 2012a:9). Also of noteworthy concern, the percentage of young people who had not had a job for a year or longer in 2011 had almost doubled since 2008 (FYA, 2011).

These trends are of great significance for teenagers and young adults with interrupted or inadequate schooling, growing up in disadvantaged families with unemployment histories, and/or lacking in academic aptitude and skills. The problem of declining access to the full-time labour market is not evenly distributed but is concentrated in suburbs and regional areas where employment opportunities for all age groups have steadily reduced over the past 20 years.

PART 2:   THE UNDERLYING CONDITIONS OF TODAY'S CHILDHOOD

A puzzling paradox – economic growth, affluence, consumption and technology do not necessarily translate into a good childhood

Today, Australia is almost three times richer—in terms of GDP— than it was before the Second World War. The global population has increased three times in the last seventy years and Australia's population has more than doubled. Our cities have grown faster than at any time in our urban history. As a wealthy country we have access to the world's markets, and to a vast range of consumer goods, technologies and services. Our economic prosperity, originally based on natural resources and a protected economy, has made a largely successful transition to the globalised economy, exposure to competition, technological innovation, and immigration from all over the world.

In Australia, the start of the new millennium was a time of great optimism for the future. Why then, just over a decade later, on many key indicators of children's health and wellbeing, is our story one of the persistence of old problems and the emergence of new problems for an increasing number of children and young people?

Why have the numbers of notifications of abused and neglected children been increasing, not only as a result of improved identification and reporting, but possibly as indications of greater prevalence and severity of abuse and neglect? Why has the number of children in out of home care doubled in the first decade of this century? Why are mental health and learning problems in children and young people increasing? Why are education standards declining for many children, particularly in disadvantaged areas? What does it mean that an increasing proportion of young people in this wealthy country are neither in full-time work nor full-time education, again particularly in the outer suburbs of our capital cities and many rural towns and regions? And why are the standards of health and wellbeing of children in some Indigenous communities far lower than they were before the referendum which gave their parents full citizenship in 1967?

To make some attempt to answer these questions, we need to examine interrelated changes based on how different economic, social, environmental, technological and cultural systems interact, and explore how their impacts on each other may adversely affect today's children.

(1) CHANGING FAMILIES—FEWER CHILDREN, MORE CONFLICT, MORE STRESS

The authors of *Children of the Lucky Country* (Stanley, Richardson and Pryor, 2005) gave careful consideration to the radical changes in Australian families taking place at the beginning of this century. By 2005 the birth rate had almost halved in the last 40 years, largely because 'women are marrying later, if at all, having children later, if at all, and having fewer children' (2005:70). Women's options had increased and continued to increase and one of the outcomes was simply fewer children.

However, at the same time, Stanley and her colleagues point out that fewer men had become fathers, as a result of other major changes. From 1978 to 2003 the proportion of men between 25-34 who had both a full-time job and a partner declined from 70% to just below 50%; and the proportion of men between 35-44 who had both a full-time job and a partner declined from 80% to 65% (2005:85). In this story, the decline of full-time work for young male adults is a significant factor—for part-time work is often not a good enough base to start and support a family.

Further there are indications that not only are men reluctant to parent, but when they do they are reluctant to meet their obligations in the family and continue to meet their obligations after separation and divorce. Men's retreat from parenthood may be one of the most significant changes to today's childhood. This issue has been the subject of intensive analysis in the U.S. and the U.K. (see for example the work of Anver Offer, 2006).

Again, these changes are paradoxical. Surely a wealthier and growing economy with fewer dependent children should be more able to support the conditions which foster a good childhood for all children? Stanley, Richardson and Pryor (2005) suggest however, there are perverse consequences arising from these radical changes:

- fewer children may mean over time that communities become less accommodating of children – the perspectives and needs of singles and couples without children may become paramount (2005:86);
- when most families and households had children there was an agreed and shared sense of obligation to children across the community—but when an increasing number of adults elect not to have children this 'compact' about children weakens and dissolves (2005:87);
- a society with many children is committed to preparing for their futures, but societies with few children are more committed to the present (2005:88); and
- fewer children means smaller families, and more one child families in particular, and these changes re-shape not only the experience of childhood itself, but construct a future without brothers and sisters and by extension fewer and fewer aunts and uncles and cousins (2005:89-90).

In this context Stanley, Richardson and Pryor (2005) suggest:

> In the urbanised mobile world of today, one consequence of small families is that people will have fewer people who have known them all their lives. While this anonymity will be liberating for some, it is likely to leave others without a solid sense of self, place and connection. Life will be harder for those who do not have a talent for friendship. We can be sure that the world of small families will be different, and people will adapt. It may or may not be better. (2005:90-91)

There is little new evidence to suggest these patterns identified by *Children of the Lucky Country* in 2005 had changed direction or even slowed down by the beginning of the current decade.

And the issues are not unique to Australia. UNICEF produces *The State of the World's Children* reports on an annual basis. In 2011 the report focused on adolescence (UNICEF, 2011). The report confirms the increased prevalence of significant mental health issues in adolescents over the past 30 years, and drew particular attention to disruption and stress in families and rapidly escalating youth unemployment as critical issues impacting on the contemporary experience of childhood and youth.

Early in 2012, Mission Australia released its *National Survey of Young Australians 2011*, and of particular interest was the finding across all States that the four issues of most concern to young people were coping with stress, school or study problems, body image and family conflict (Mission Australia, 2012:12-14). The Victorian analysis of almost 7,500 participants showed that 38.4% identified coping with stress as their greatest concern, a significant increase from the 17.8% who did so in 2009, and the 26.7% in 2010 (Mission Australia, 2012:111-113). There is no evidence presented in the report suggesting these four areas of personal concern for young people are interrelated, but they are consistent with the UNICEF report and other factors defining childhood and adolescence identified in this paper.

Parkinson (2011) in *For Kids' Sake* identified and carefully documented some of the same issues discussed in *Children of the Lucky Country* (Stanley et al, 2005), but focuses particularly on the national divorce rate, the continuing rise of ex-nuptial births, the rise of cohabitation and parenthood, and the increasing absence of fathers (Parkinson, 2011:45-61 and 62-68). Consistent with his argument that we have to understand the changing social environment of children, he identified family, family separation, the continuation of conflict after separation, conflict in single parent families and step-families, and the financial impacts of family disruption and separation as the most critical factors impacting on the wellbeing of today's children and young people.

On this basis he argues as follows:

> If there is one major demographic change in western societies that can be linked to a large range of adverse consequences for children and young people, it is the growth in the number of children who experience life in a family other than living with their two biological parents, at some point before the age of 16. (Parkinson, 2011:48)

In the context of the Australian Council of Governments' (COAG, 2009) nationwide call for all sectors of society to reduce child abuse and neglect, Parkinson proposes that '(w)hat is needed is a partnership between government, professional organisations and local communities to support families and children' (Parkinson, 2011:75). Specifically, Parkinson calls on governments to take a number of steps to strengthen marriage and

families, including preparation and education for marriage and parenthood, wide ranging support services for families, programs on parent-child relationships, and mechanisms to implement these services (Parkinson, 2011:1-5).

Significantly however, Parkinson (2011) does not address the underlying conditions which may be undermining marriage, enduring two parent relationships, and enduring parenting. Parkinson's (2011) particular focus on marriage does not address other key changes in Australia today, which Berry Street considers are also defining the experience of childhood, especially disadvantaged childhood.

(2) INCREASING INEQUALITY AND LOCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE ARE NOW DEFINING THE ENVIRONMENTS OF MANY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

An underlying assumption of modern western economies is that the more the economy grows, the richer we become, then everyone benefits, especially children. Growth strategies were usually prefaced with the well-known and compelling metaphor that a 'rising tide will lift all boats'. Now it appears that while this outcome is true of some economies, for others, increasing growth may actually increase inequality and impact adversely on some people's economic status and their health and wellbeing.

In *Children of the Lucky Country* (2005) the authors discuss evidence demonstrating increasing inequality in Australia particularly in terms of the escalation in the difference between low wages and high wages. The authors take care to point out that public family payments and child support payments soften in part the wage differences and make Australia more equal than countries like the U.S. and the U.K. (2005:96-103). However the authors conclude that at the time of presenting their findings about children, three recent developments were clouding the promise of a fair and equal Australia. One was the growing divide between rich families and poor families (particularly in terms of income), the second was 'increasing separation of the advantaged and disadvantaged into (distinctly) different suburbs', and the third was the promotion of education in private schools at the expense of public schools, leading to the declining quality of public schools (2005:103). None of these differences have diminished since this analysis, rather on many measures they have increased.

These changes are interrelated, which intensifies their effects. For example, in 2012 Uniting Care Children, Young People and Families commissioned a study on before and after school hours care programs undertaken by the Centre for Social and Economic Modelling at the University of Canberra. The report indicated that only 1% of children in low income families use out of school hours care compared to over 20% of children from relatively well-off families (Cassells & Miranti, 2012). This critical service, which enables both parents or a single parent to work, especially full-time, is heavily weighted towards those who can afford to pay for it (Horin, 2012).

This story of growing inequality in countries like Australia is the central message of English epidemiologists Wilkinson and Pickett in their work *The Spirit Level* (2009). Amongst other things they compared certain differences between the most equal and wealthy countries in the world—the Netherlands, Japan, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, with the most unequal and wealthy countries of the world – the U.S., U.K., and Portugal, and countries becoming less equal such as N.Z., Canada and Australia. Across a wide range of different internationally comparable indicators of health and wellbeing, they found that the most equal wealthy countries do far better than the most unequal wealthy countries (2009:15-24).

This analysis included 40 different indicators of child wellbeing including infant mortality, mental illness, children's educational performance, teenage births, obesity and homicides. They report that lower levels of child wellbeing are consistently correlated to increased levels of inequality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009:15-24). Put in the positive, the most *equal and wealthy* advanced countries in the world—the Netherlands, Japan, Finland, Sweden, and Norway do much better on all indicators of child and adult wellbeing. These authors go further—in the most *unequal and wealthy* advanced countries economic growth does not improve overall health and wellbeing. Growth in unequal countries generally increases their levels of inequality, and adversely impacts on their performance on health and wellbeing indicators, compared to wealthy equal countries.

Wilkinson and Pickett have serious critics who suggest they overstate their findings, in that the ranking of countries according to their average performances on wealth, equality, and health and wellbeing indicators

does not give sufficient insight into the more complex differences and patterns within both wealthy equal countries and wealthy unequal countries. In other words dealing with averages may distort the relationships between equality, inequality and health and wellbeing.

However the argument does provide some guidance, if not conclusive answers, to the central question raised by Stanley, Richardson and Prior: why has our increasing growth, prosperity and technological progress not delivered improved health and wellbeing for all children? Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) report the instability, uncertainty, and economic vulnerability of people in unequal but rich countries generate the conditions which are bad for many families with children—more anxiety, depression, fear, social insecurity, lack of self-esteem, lack of pride, shame, aggressiveness, resentment and violence. These are the experiences of childhood which Berry Street recognises in many of the adolescents in care— broken trust, abuse, trauma, desertion, deep experience of parental failure, poor self-esteem, teenage frustration and violence, and the restless search for gratification in quick fixes. In an earlier study, Marmot and Wilkinson reported on the relationship between inequality and social affiliation and suggest the emergence of 'a "culture of inequality" that is more aggressive, less connected, more violent and less trusting' (2001:1235). Wilkinson and Pickett find that in a country like Cuba, with much lower income levels than the U.S., 'life expectancy and infant mortality rates are almost identical to the United States' (2009:220).

Professor Tony Vinson and Jesuit Social Services add another dimension to this analysis in their work on locational disadvantage (and therefore locational inequality) within Victoria and Australia (Jesuit Social Services, 1999, 2004, 2010; Vinson, 2007). Vinson collected extensive social, health and economic data on 726 post codes in Australia, demonstrating conclusively a high concentration of social disadvantage within 72 of the postcode areas. The report of the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children's Inquiry* (2012) has confirmed the significance of this work and identified the relationship between a concentration of locational disadvantage and high rates of child abuse and neglect. This Inquiry, drawing on its own investigations and the submission of Jesuit Social Services finds that 'child maltreatment distribution tends to be linked to a particular group of indicators that more than others help to define the outstandingly disadvantaged areas throughout Australia' (Cummins, Scott & Scales, 2012:44).

This group of indicators, as noted by Cummins, Scott and Scales (2012:44) are:
- A local population's limited education and limited computer access
- Low individual and family income
- Limited work credentials
- Poor health and disabilities, and
- Engagement in crime.

The nature of Australia's and Victoria's economic growth and technological progress, sometimes called the patchwork or two speed economy, has resulted in marked inequalities and locational disadvantages which directly impact on children's health and wellbeing. It also relates to the growing inequality in the educational and employment outcomes for teenagers and young adults.

Central to this problem is the unequal distribution of uncertainty in the struggle to be part of the economy. In 1996 Peter Marris identified what, in the aftermath of the global financial crises in 2008, is self-evident today. The conditions which are considered to be critical to the wellbeing of children—namely stable, caring, enduring and strong relationships—the conditions we know are the foundations of attachment and the formation of identity and belonging—were the exact opposite to the right way to handle economic relationships at the end of the twentieth century. Rather 'the successful management of the economy depends increasingly on lack of commitment, constant change and instability' (Marris, 1996).

This unequal distribution of uncertainty was also identified by Sue Palmer a decade later—she found the most economically successful nations embracing competition, innovation, long hours at work and capacity to embrace change, were becoming more and more hostile to bringing up children, even for families well established in the dynamic, rewarding but volatile labour markets of the early twenty-first century (Palmer, 2006).

(3) AFFLUENCE, CHOICE AND CONSUMPTION ARE IMPACTING ON FAMILY LIFE

The problem which has emerged in more unequal societies is that families outside the secure, stable and growing parts of the economy and related labour markets, or outside the labour markets altogether, now have to raise their children on the fragile base of casual, part-time and often low paid work, or welfare payments. Even workers, who have for many decades enjoyed the promise of secure and valued work in well-established Australian industries, particularly agriculture and manufacturing, know they now face uncertain futures. Thousands of workers over the past few decades have seen their employer's commitment to them and their communities decline as firms are forced to reduce their vulnerability to global markets. Of course some workers have thrived on the opportunities which arise out of uncertainty, but many, especially those less equipped for the rapid adaptations required, have not made the necessary transitions.

They do this while living in an increasingly affluent society which constantly encourages increased consumption. As a result, many families face the contradiction of reduced certainty and security and increased pressures and inducements to spend. Avner Offer, the Chichele Professor of Economic History at the University of Oxford, has extensively and rigorously examined the impacts of markets and the ever increasing options for choice and consumption in the U.S. and the U.K. since the 1950's. In 2006 he published his extensive findings and concluded that affluence and constant innovation and choice can erode our self-control and commitment, thereby undermining both our individual and collective wellbeing (Offer, 2006).

Offer's central argument is that the constant flow of innovation, novelty and inducements to improve our lives through consumption, undermines both our self-control and our commitments. Further, it weakens established and proven ways of living based on patience, deferral, prudence and commitment to our obligations.

> The challenge of affluence is coping with novelty. Novelty will continue at an ever faster pace. Understanding this challenge is necessary to coping with it. (Offer, 2006:11)

The question is whether these processes have any relationship to the declining wellbeing of children. Offer believes they do, because constantly engaging with market choices reduces the 'costly and time consuming need to negotiate and compromise with others and to contract with the future' (2006:74). In turn all this makes us 'eager consumers for the next twist in immediate gratification. The compelling products of innovation raise the psychic cost of investing in long term rewards' (2006:74).

And raising children represents a high and long term 'psychic' cost.

For people outside the labour market and secure futures the question is: why defer, why commit, why save for a future so uncertain and so little under their control? Uncertainty, particularly with respect to work and some sense of economic control, thereby weakens not only self-control but also commitments to others (Marris, 1996a:10). In this way we lose the rationale to defer gratification, to be prudent, to be modest in our consumption—and perhaps to make commitments to the future of others. As Offer puts it, 'prudence has built up affluence, but affluence undermines prudence' (2006:4).

Traditionally governments have encouraged prudence and commitments to the future as key parts of public policy. Rewarding young people's engagements with tertiary education by deferring tuition fees, or conferring tax advantages to encourage saving as in superannuation, are well known examples. These are what Offer (2006) calls 'commitment devices'. However families and individuals have to be in the main game for these incentives to commitment to actually work. And unfortunately affluence, electronic marketing and increasing uncertainty in the labour market have all arrived at the same time. Further, many young parents would not have seen or experienced the prudence and deferral of earlier generations—these collective memories are fading in an environment defined by 'no need to wait'.

Affluence and constant technological innovation present us with ever changing new choices and new experiences, but this dazzling world of real and virtual change may not be what parents and children need. Offer concludes his examination of different impacts of affluence with one chapter describing the sustained negative consequences of affluence and choice for women and children (2006:335-337).

Studies of the scale and depth of Offer have not been conducted in Australia and care must be taken in making an uncritical transfer of this knowledge to Australian society, culture and families. However these findings are consistent with those of Australian National University's independent researcher Richard Eckersley (1997, 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2006), whose work with Australian youth finds similar patterns. The significance of materialism and consumption in the lives of Australian children and young people and the increasing focus on finding identity through consumption are all central to Eckersley's work.

According to Eckersley, the dominance of consumer perspectives in modern western cultures 'undermines, even reverses universal values and time-tested wisdom' (2006:8). Constant and pervasive marketing constitutes the 'promotion of images and ideals of "the good life" that serve the economy but do not meet psychological needs or reflect social values' (2006:12).

Clive Hamilton called this 'the freedom paradox' (Hamilton, 2008). Markets and media give us the impression of control of our lives through infinite choices, but for some children and parents the outcome can be the opposite. While the choices offered are always in their face, living and working in the casual labour market, waiting for a telephone call about losing or winning one short term contract, undermines both the sense and meaning of control. Consistent with the findings of Offer, Hamilton also finds that affluence 'has outpaced the development of greater prudence' (2008:54-55).

Of course children who are secure in their identities and relationships, and have a sense they are in control of their futures, supported by parents and teachers and trusted friends, can walk through the market place untroubled by what they do not own or indifferent to how advertising says they should look. They *know they have a future* and can forgo, or defer as Offer would say, the rewards of the present. As long as they can look to family, teachers and friends for endorsement and recognition, then deferral, prudence, study, and commitment all make sense. For children who do not have such security and structure in their lives, self-regulation and self-control can be major issues. Stanley, Richardson and Pryor point out that in 'most western societies good self-regulation is characteristic of children who are mentally healthy, socially competent, conscientious and socially responsible', but 'poor self-regulation is a common characteristic of children who have behaviour problems such as impulsivity, hyperactivity, aggression and antisocial behaviour and is often seen in children with disabilities such as foetal alcohol syndrome' (2005:29). These are the children Berry Street works with, as do many other out of home care providers, family services and youth services.

The impacts of this contemporary construction of freedom as consumption and choice are very significant for children and young people in their formative years. The consequences, says Eckersley may reflect a 'growing failure of modern western culture to provide an adequate framework of hope, moral values, and sense of belonging and meaning in our lives, so weakening social cohesion and personal resilience' (1997:423).

Zaretsky, in his work on the history of psychoanalysis in the context of modern capitalism, describes these changes for all of us, not just young people. He sees recent times in terms of what he calls the decline of an inner directed life. That is a process by which 'the inner gyroscope', that 'internal steering device that keeps one on course regardless of external influences, has (now) become a radar beam, scanning the external environment' (2004:310). The critical reference points in the process of defining 'direction' move from intrinsic values defined by culture, tradition, belief and harmony with nature, to the extrinsic values of the media, cyberspace and the market.

In the long term study of American college students (Twenge et al, 2010) previously referred to, the most statistically significant correlation between the increases in mental health issues over the 69 years was a rise in 'extrinsic' values and decline in 'intrinsic' values. In this analysis, extrinsic values were defined as material and individualist in character, and were marked by possessions, financial status, affluence and career success. Intrinsic values were related to the importance of close relationships, the strength of attachments and having a meaningful philosophy of life. So the more the significance of material success increased and the significance of meaning and purpose in life declined, the more the mental health of American college students declined.

(4) TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA ARE RADICALLY REWRITING THE EXPERIENCE OF CHILDHOOD

Families rearing children in the twenty-first century are doing so in a society which, for the first time, gives the media, markets and their technologies increasingly powerful roles in family life, parenting, child development and education. For many families the media and technology are becoming more influential than parents, friends, culture, community, religion and belief.

Most of us have taken the view that these changes represent progress, and on balance this progress has been positive by facilitating and broadening children's engagement with the world. There is little doubt that today's children who make informed, constructive and balanced use of the media, new technologies and the markets available to them are, or appear to be, far better equipped for this century than are many of their parents. However, the penetration of these technologies and markets is coming at earlier and earlier stages of children's development, and the consequences may not always be beneficial.

Marketing to Children

Arlie Hochschild (2003a) has made the penetration of the market into the life of the family a major feature of her life's work. She invites us to consider the relationship between the family and markets. Three centuries ago the family was a multifunction service provider—school, hospital, refuge, church, house of correction and old people's home. Gradually most of these functions were taken over by the state and then more recently the state contracted many of them to the market. The market has responded and the choices have increased, sometimes strengthening and liberating families, sometimes weakening them.

As the function of the family and the state decreases, the market becomes more culturally dominant for both the family and society. The speed of this process has escalated today as a result of the penetration of the media and technology into the home (Hochschild, 2003b).

According to Hochschild (2003b) the following happens:

- we come to define ourselves in market terms, constantly framed by choice
- commercial images and fantasies can deskill us, especially when we are young, as our commodities of choice imagine for us, create our dreams and so 'we develop a consumer orientation to the imaginative life', and
- the market promotes a paradigm (or models) for how to relate to one another—personally, commercially, sexually, professionally.

Up until the last two decades of the twentieth century, in most Australian homes parents made all the purchasing decisions, and so they were the customers the markets wanted to attract. Since the late 1980s however, children have been treated as shoppers in their own right. Children have become a huge market in the world economy, not just as pathways to their parent's credit card, but as real identities and autonomous participants able to influence household decisions, able to appraise products, identify differences, retain knowledge about products and reach decisions on the preferred purchase (Cook, 2000:490).

In short, markets and technologies are changing and reconstructing the nature and experience of childhood (Bakan, 2011; Beder, 2009; Cook, 2000; Edgar & Edgar, 2009; Palmer, 2006; Reist, 2009). Children are now 'little consumers, being prepared for a lifetime of shopping' says Patricia Edgar, one of Australia's most astute observers of childhood and an authority on children's television. Further, Edgar claims 'by the age of 10 years 78% of children say they enjoy shopping and are well on the way to being successful consumers' (Edgar, 2009).

The sophistication of contemporary marketing strategies for children should not be underestimated. One of the original architects of marketing to children was Martin Lindstrom. Born in Denmark he started his own advertising company at the age of 12 years (Bakan, 2011). He believed that the secret of marketing to children was to understand and appeal to the distinctive emotions of the young, particularly as the emotions rather than reason and knowledge drive almost all decisions children make (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2005). Joel Bakan, U.S. professor of law, critically reviews the way Lindstrom developed strategies for marketing to children (Bakan, 2011).

As reported by Bakan (2011), Lindstrom's strategies for effective advertising to children should engage the following feelings:

- Love—nurturing, affection and romance
- Fear—violence, cruelty, horror
- Mastery—the need for children to learn new skills and become less dependent on adults
- Fantasy—the need to dream and escape
- Humour—particularly the capacity to make fun of adults and others
- Collection value—meeting the need to collect groups or sequences of objects
- Mirror effect—providing children and adolescents with the capacity to imitate adults.

While there is nothing surprising in this list, as a mix of emotions which can be embedded in the marketing and the actual product, toy or game being advertised, they are powerful forces in the lives of children. Children without developed critical and reflective capacity are very vulnerable to the strategic manipulation of their feelings. When the engagement with the child is interactive, Lindstrom considered his emotions based strategy to be even more effective. Out of this kind of reasoning came the clever advertising and product constructions to 'brand' children and capture them for the long term (Bakan, 2011; Lindstrom & Seybold, 2005).

We can see these strategies in the changing nature of toys and their meaning for children. Toys, according to Australian researcher Wendy Varney (2012), have become increasingly less open ended and increasingly designed for specific purposes. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of distinctive educational approaches to children which focused on their own creativity, imagination and the natural world, recommended faceless dolls which could be imagined by children in many different identities and situations. However, as Varney (2012) found, dolls now come as very distinct identities with wardrobes, roles, careers, tools, relatives, pets and an endless range of other artefacts, including celebrity. They are designed for brand awareness and encourage children to find identity and self-esteem through the brand. They discourage creativity, imagination, skill, exploration and critique. The same is true of other kinds of toys.

These issues arising from today's marketing to children are often discussed on the Australian Broadcasting Commission's program *Gruen Transfer* or *Gruen Planet*. The penetration of advertising into family life and the targeting of children appears to be of concern to many people from many different standpoints. However, in the *Gruen Planet* when the marketing experts discuss these issues about modern advertising to children, they generally arrive at the same conclusion. That is, ultimately parents are the principle regulators. Public regulation of the media and advertising often portrayed as representing the 'nanny state', will never be able to protect children in evolving twenty-first century market places. As advertising executive Todd Sampson succinctly puts it, parents now have to 'world proof' their children because we cannot 'child proof' the world (The Age, October 2011, quoting Todd Sampson, *Gruen Planet*, 8 September 2011).

Unquestionably however, constant clever marketing to children and their emotions introduces new dimensions to both childhood and parenting—especially the seemingly endless experience of negotiation, diversion, deferral, conflict, capitulation and denial. While to a certain extent it has always been thus, marketing directly into the child's world and the child's bedroom are real never before changes in the experience of childhood. They also represent a marked shift in the stresses experienced by both children and parents.

Even so, these marketing strategies are less likely to capture and control those children and young people who have a strong sense of connectedness and belonging, are emotionally resilient and feel secure in their learning, work and community. However those children who are vulnerable and isolated, or whose parents are outside of or on the edge of the dynamic economy, hanging in on a short term contract, exhausted with work and child rearing, the impacts and dominance of markets in their lives can erode capacity to turn their back on the siren call of never ending options for stimulation, identity and belonging.

The sexualisation of children

Along with the increase in marketing to children, we have also seen the rise of the early sexualisation of children through media, marketing, and products targeted to children. Parents and many different community groups in Australia and other western countries have been voicing their concerns on this issue for a number of

years. Whilst little empirical research has been conducted to determine the long term effects of the sexualisation of children, the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia (2012) reviewed five major inquiries in Australia, the U.S., the U.K. and Scotland which addressed the possible impacts of the sexualisation of children by the media and advertising.

The potential impacts for children raised in these studies and reports include the following:

- hindering of a healthy body image and self-esteem
- impacts on cognitive and emotional development
- potential development of mental health issues such as depression, 'appearance' anxiety and eating disorders
- impacts on the conceptualisation of sexuality and gender and sexual roles, and
- lowered aspirations and educational achievements for girls.

In a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children on the Contemporary Media Environment, the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner concluded that:

> (t)he sexualisation of children not only has negative effects upon an individual child's cognitive, physical and mental health, and attitudes and beliefs, but ultimately the sexualisation of children contributes to the diminution of childhood. This diminution involves both a shortening of, and a hastened experience of, childhood, and also, a devaluing of the period of childhood as an intrinsically valuable and significant period in a person's life. (2008:7)

Children's identities, digital and media technologies

'Early childhood is the time', says Baroness Susan Greenfield when 'there is a huge potential for anything and everything to leave its mark, almost literally, on the brain' (Greenfield, 2008:59). Then, as the brain matures, at the age of six or seven or even later, we 'start to evaluate the world in terms of what has gone before: now there is a two way street between the outside and our personal memories' (2008:59). Over these critical years faces and objects start to mean something to us, and as a result we start 'to navigate the world, not as a passive recipient of (our) senses, but in an incessant dialogue between (our) brain and the outside world' (2008:59).

However when children are exposed to media and new technologies at an earlier and earlier age, the experience of childhood and the formation of identity are inseparably related to these experiences (Greenfield, 2010). Today's children can access the world in ways not even contemplated during the childhood of many of our contemporary decision makers and community leaders. By the time they are 12 years of age, Australian children spend on average four hours a day on the Internet, watching DVDs and TV and playing games—as Don Edgar and Patricia Edgar put it, 'they are multi-media savvy and can be on a number of medias at the same time' (Edgar & Edgar, 2008; Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007; Greenfield, 2010).

The engagement with technology in shaping children's identities starts younger and younger, and may become the preferred way children explore the world because it opens the possibility of virtual but safe experiences they would never have in real life. But it may also shape the experience of childhood in ways we do not like. It is estimated that the average American child, by the age of 12, will have seen 100,000 acts of violence and 8,000 murders (Beder, 2009). Many children now learn about sex and start to shape their own sexual identities through pornography, a market which has escalated from a minor industry to a huge global business.

Not surprisingly, as new technologies become available, their application to children follows close behind. Initially computer manufacturers did not develop touch screen technologies for the very young. Then it was realised that touching and swiping, unlike operating key pads on a laptop, are intuitive actions for children, and as a consequence especially toughened iPads and iPhones are now considered accessible toys for toddlers. One mother is reported to be very enthusiastic about iPads for her daughters—4years old, 3years old and 21 months old—not only because of their role as aids to spelling and adding up, but also their value as a 'portable

babysitter sitter' (Toddlers, touch screens and the parents' dilemma, The Weekend Australian, January 7-8, 2012).

Bruce Perry, a world leader in the field of neuroscience and children, notes that the dilution of a relational environment for children in western societies, due, amongst other things, to large amounts of 'screen' time, has 'created a poverty of relationships for millions of children'—a poverty, he argues, that is 'far more destructive than economic poverty' (Perry, in press). There is a broad perception that social connectedness can serve as a protective factor against many forms of child abuse (Ungar & Perry, 2012), thus the shift towards lengthy hours of screen time for children and declining 'real time' connections with others is of noteworthy concern.

The longstanding argument as to whether violent video games impact adversely on young people now appears to be resolved. According to Professor Douglas Gentile (2012), screen based technologies and particularly games are addictive, particularly for young people who are impulsive, with low social competence and who spend a long time playing. According to Gentile, rates of gaming addiction are high, ranging from $7^{%}$ to $10^{%}$ of young people in a wide range of countries. However he stresses it is not the addictive nature of gaming which is the principal factor here, but the risk factors in the players (Gentile, 2012). Not surprisingly, vulnerable, isolated and insecure children and young people are more likely to be addicted.

The consequences for addicted players are higher levels of depression, anxiety, lower grades in school and more social isolation. Like so many technologies, the new communication technologies can be of great benefit, and also great harm. For some children, technology may not deliver the experience of childhood they need. According to Greenfield, some children now seem to continually crave some form of electronic stimulation, and appear to lose the capacity to create their own play (2008).

Finding your identity and sense of meaning on the internet can be exhilarating if you are in command of your own feelings and have the confidence to be critical and reflective. But this is exactly what some children are not good at—especially those already hurt and betrayed by those close to them.

Berry Street's greatest challenge is working with children and young people to help them to build their identities, self-respect, self-control, and the ability to trust. Only in this way will they be able to find the relationships and friendships which make them strong, secure and resilient. This task is at its hardest when young people have experienced broken trust, betrayal and trauma. For these young people, media generated identities, identification with brands and celebrities can be so appealing. They may also be temporary, isolating, addictive, costly and ultimately illusionary.

(5) CHILDHOOD IS COMPRESSED BUT ADULTHOOD IS DEFERRED

Growing up faster

Markets and technologies can work together to speed up the experience of childhood. Over the past decade it has become clear that it is in the interests of some corporations in particular to advance the maturation of children, so they graduate to being a consumer faster and earlier. For example, parents are encouraged to purchase products, toys, aids to learning and activities which will improve the pace of their children's cognitive development (Beder, 2009; Edgar and Edgar, 2009).

These shifts are sometimes called the 'compression of time'—designed to push children out of a precious childlike consciousness into an 'adult-in-the-making consciousness', focusing on their minds, their bodies, their diets, their clothes, their sexuality and their image. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this story is the huge investment now dedicated to the early sexualisation of children—creating a consciousness of sexuality long before it is biologically real and long before it is in any way useful for a good childhood. The rites of passage associated with adulthood such as the experience of sex, drinking alcohol, and other forms of risk taking are also occurring earlier and earlier, often encouraged by advertising and other media.

Is it all happening too fast? Are children losing the joyful, unselfconscious, carefree experience of childhood? Children's engagement with the world, and many would say especially the natural world, are the most precious of life's experiences. Together with the child's nurturing and loving relationships, they are the most

important foundations of their identity and security. Patricia Edgar identifies the relationship between this 'compression of time' and some of the emerging mental health issues of today's children. She states:

> Eating disorders and body image concerns among boys and girls are common. Tiny bright young things, who should be out playing chasey together, are worrying about what they look like and whether they fit in with their peers. There is an increase in child mental health problems including depression. These trends are well documented. (Edgar, 2009)

Children are experiencing images of how they should look and behave which they are not ready to process, and messages about the supposed ideal body are getting through to young children well before they are able to control their meaning and implications. It is hard enough for many young people, even 20 year olds, to deal with this constant focus on image, but today's children are now part of the market place from a very early age.

Catherine McDonald, from RMIT, also challenges this subversion of an authentic childhood from a different perspective. Professionals, anxious to advance the cause of children, often use the leverage of the cost effectiveness of early investment as a saving against future costs, further reinforcing the significance of the *adult* future over the legitimacy of the *child* present. In this way, welfare categorisations of children, according to McDonald 'are predicated upon assumptions about the impacts of individual and collective futures, and on children as a form of human capital investment' (2007:6). When our approach to childhood is based only on their futures, we lose sight of the essential nature of childhood itself. A good childhood has its own meaning, legitimacy and purpose, and according to McDonald 'children have rights to human self-realisation as children, not as *embryonic adults'* (2007:6, emphasis in the original).

Berry Street strongly agrees with this position. The experience of a good childhood is the best preparation for a healthy and independent adulthood.

Adulthood and independence deferred

At the same time, the patterns of the education and work careers of young people, as discussed earlier, have changed markedly. For some young people today, adulthood seems to be continuously 'on hold'. The transition experiences of today's youth are very different from their parents. A major study of young people who left school in 1991, called the *Life-Patterns Project* (Andres and Wyn, 2010; Wyn et al, 2009; Wyn et al, 2012; Wyn and Woodman, 2006) found, for example, that 87% of this cohort left school to go directly into post-secondary education, while 42% of their parents did not even finish secondary school (Andres and Wyn, 2010).

This remarkable change over only one generation demonstrates not only the extension of educational careers into the twenties but a major ongoing deferral of full-time work. The study found that many 1991 school leavers ended up taking much longer to establish themselves in the labour market and find partners and start families. In fact it took 14 years (after leaving school) for the majority of the participants in the study to find employment stability. Even with a degree or other forms of post-secondary qualification, many were moving in and out of jobs with little or no security late into their twenties and early thirties (Andres and Wyn, 2010). For these young adults, their parent's model of an ideal adult future in the form of secure full-time work, settling down, marrying and having children has to be significantly reinvented. Early adulthood is no longer so much defined by stability, security and continuity, according to Wyn and Woodman (2006), but by innovation and constantly responding to opportunity and change.

For some, the promise of the late modern technological era, especially new and exciting careers in knowledge, media and communication industries, expanding professional careers and opportunities in niche and competitive manufacturing markets, have only been partially realised. Major growth has occurred in service and hospitality industries, but this is work many had as students and is largely temporary, low paid and at variable hours.

Also, as previously discussed, for school leavers at 15 or 16 years the option of a secure full-time job has been in steady decline for almost 30 years. For disadvantaged teenagers with low school achievement, part-time work and/or unemployment are not sound pathways into economic independence, enduring mature adult relationships and parenthood.

In summary, full-time work for teenagers and young adults is coming later and later in their life experience and for some not at all. For teenagers and young adults in tertiary education, well supported by their families the option of part-time work is a significant advantage, especially when flexible part-time work can be adjusted to their changing education schedules. However Berry Street's experience would suggest that when young people do not have control over their own work and role in the economic world, they will consider themselves to be 'less vulnerable if they do not invest in it any personal meaning' (Marris, 1996:109). Too many disadvantaged young people are proceeding into adulthood without completing their secondary education and without the challenge, structure, engagement and self-respect which generally comes with full-time work.

These changes often take place in the context of other key changes for disadvantaged teenagers and young adults—family instability, family conflict, rising housing costs, declining mental health, and low incomes with which to manage their transitions into an affluent consumer oriented world. Over the next ten years, these changes could prove to be very significant factors impacting on the wellbeing of many of today's teenagers. And some will go into the responsibility of parenthood without having experienced the rigors, demands and benefits of full-time work. They have been pushed to the margins of an economy which promises so much to many of their peers, but seems like a dead-end to them.

PART 3:   CONCLUSION

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN AND WHAT CAN WE DO?

The twenty-first century is a great time for those children in emotionally and economically stable and secure families. There are more opportunities and choices than ever previously imagined. However at the same time there are new realities which threaten the experience of a good childhood. Whilst it is true that every era brings new developments and changes to society, the pace of change and the complex interplay of these changes in contemporary society are unprecedented.

Central to our understanding of childhood today is the speed of political, economic, moral, cultural, ecological and technological change and the consequent challenges to not only our economy and environment but also to the experience of childhood. And the interfaces of those forces which define our society are now so volatile that our command of the future seems fragile.

Most contemporary decision makers and leaders would have experienced their early childhood in the second half of the last century—the so called 'golden years' of childhood. Most would have experienced a childhood largely modelled on that of their parents and grandparents. Most would have expected and in fact experienced a standard of education which would project them into full-time, secure and respected work. The traditions of family, neighbourhood, faith and belief, culture, secure work, frugality, and commitment to a better future linked different generations, and were the basis for shared meaning as well as a growing tolerance for difference.

Today, however, the speed of this change is increasing to the point that children born now will experience a childhood markedly different from that of their parents, and almost totally different from that of their grandparents. The environment in which many children grow up is no longer defined by slow, progressive and incremental improvement, but by rapid and unpredictable events, some of which appear to be of great benefit, and some of which are changing the experience of childhood in ways we do not fully understand, let alone control.

It is not as if we have lost the knowledge of what has constituted a good childhood, but it seems more difficult to realise it in the context of rapid change. And we have limited ways of predicting, understanding, monitoring and controlling the impact of progress on children. Shared cultural, political and moral commitments to children are becoming confused, contested and weakened in the face of the unstoppable changes, disruptions and uncertainty.

The U.K. Children's Society and the Good Childhood Inquiry

The Children's Society is a children's charity which wants to create a society where children and young people are valued, respected and happy. Like Berry Street, the Society is committed to helping vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including safeguarding children in care and young people who are homeless and losing their way. The state of childhood is one of the recurring topics of our times. Also like Berry Street, the Children's Society recognises that 'today's children and young people live in an era of rapid change, which poses particular challenges for their growth and development. In this climate, there is growing concern about the health and wellbeing of our children. Politicians, academia and the media alike ponder how best to bring up the nation's children. Yet for all our concern, the way in which we view and value our children and young people is beset with contradictions and uncertainty' (The Children's Society, 2006:4).

Just as Stanley, Richardson and Pryor found at the beginning of this century, in the U.K. the Children's Society concluded that 'our wealth has not brought us the kind of childhood we want for our children'. In parallel with the findings summarised in this paper, the Children's Society reported that while 'average incomes in the United Kingdom have doubled in the last 50 years, people are no happier today, on average, than people were fifty years ago. In fact, for young people in particular, there is evidence to suggest that the opposite is true: that improved economic conditions seem to be associated with increasing levels of emotional problems'. For example 'depression and anxiety have increased for both boys and girls aged 15-16 since the mid-1980s, as

have what are called 'non-aggressive conduct problems' such as lying, stealing and disobedience' (The Children's Society, 2006:4).

To give focus to these concerns, the Children's Society undertook a major project called *The Good Childhood Inquiry* commencing in 2005 and launched with a report in 2006 (The Children's Society, 2006). *The Good Childhood Inquiry* was the U.K.'s first independent national inquiry into childhood. *The Inquiry* was child-centred through a methodology that combined the views of children, young people and adults, with rigorous analysis of academic research. Conducted in collaboration with the University of York, the Society set out to understand what is affecting children's wellbeing. After many consultations and surveys, including consultations with over 30,000 children from eight to sixteen years of age, the Society provides an independent annual report on the state of the nation's children.

Significantly the U.K. Government has picked up these same themes through its *Every Child Matters* agenda, and is reframing public policy responses to children in relation to their wellbeing. As part of its agenda for change, the Government has identified five outcomes for children's wellbeing: to 'stay safe', 'be healthy', 'enjoy and achieve', 'achieve economic wellbeing' and 'make a positive contribution'. The Children's Society reports that this 'framework is becoming increasingly important in the way children's wellbeing is conceptualised and services for children and young people are structured and delivered' (The Children's Society, 2012:3).

The Decade for Childhood 2012 – 2022[1]

In the U.S., the Association for Childhood Education International and the Alliance for Childhood are leading an initiative which asks people and organisations to join *The Decade for Childhood*. They are hoping that this Decade for Childhood will provide a platform for a global conversation about childhood, the dissemination of knowledge and the consideration of best policies and practices. They have identified what they consider to be the Ten Pillars of a Good Childhood, as a starting point for conversations about what a good childhood looks like today.

The Ten Pillars of a Good Childhood

1. Safe and secure places for living and learning, with access to health care, clothing, and nutritious food
2. Strong families and loving, consistent caregivers
3. Social interactions and friendships
4. Creative play and physical activity
5. Appreciation and stewardship of the natural environment
6. Creative expression through music, dance, drama, and the other arts
7. Education that develops the full capacities of the child—cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and ethical
8. Supportive, nurturing, child-friendly communities
9. Growing independence and decision making
10. Children and youth participating in community life.

Developments in Australia

Here in Australia there are many voices speaking out on specific issues about children, including significant action by outstanding individuals, community groups and professional leaders as well as public and community agencies.

Even so, it is difficult to collectively agree on the conditions of a good childhood in the twenty-first century.

It is no longer sufficient to say there are certain problems that have always been with us and we merely need to update our solutions. In the midst of times of such dramatic change it is our duty to stop and reflect on its impact on children and young people, and to examine what childhood means in modern society.

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[1] www.decadeforchildhood.org

Unfortunately there is a significant absence of a wide public discourse about the *complexity* of contemporary elements of childhood and a lack of sustained advocacy in relation to the *interface* of many issues confronting vulnerable children. The need for leadership is clear if outcomes for Australia's vulnerable children are to markedly improve. Berry Street is acutely aware of what happens when children are denied a good childhood and as a consequence we have an obligation to identify emerging problems and their possible consequences.

Are you interested in a conversation about the future of a good childhood?

Berry Street believes it is time to re-start the conversation—first made public by Fiona Stanley as Australian of the Year in 2004—about the importance of a good childhood in Australia.

Berry Street will not seek to emulate the U.K. Children's Society in the conduct of an independent inquiry: there are other public, academic and community organisations equipped to undertake a public inquiry. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), for example, are currently engaged in a process of consultation and analysis through the NEST Project[2], with the aim of developing a national plan for child and youth wellbeing in Australia. Berry Street is one of a number of community organisations that have joined the Nest Project as a supporting partner. Similarly we have signed the Decade for Childhood pledge and will join the global conversation as an Ambassador for the Decade for Childhood.

Berry Street considers it is time to engage with others (particularly with children and young people themselves) on the three questions which launched the U.K.'s *Good Childhood Inquiry*.

They are as follows:

1. What are the conditions for a good childhood in Australia today?

2. What obstacles exist to those conditions?

3. What changes could be made that would be likely to improve childhood?

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[2] www.thenestproject.org.au

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