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The **Melbourne Social Equity Institute** (MSEI) supports interdisciplinary research on social equity issues across the full spectrum of social life including health, law, education, housing, work and transport. The MSEI brings together researchers from across the University of Melbourne to identify unjust or unfair practices that lead to social inequity and work towards finding ways to ameliorate disadvantage.

Our research is currently linked to four themes:

- Access to Public Goods
- Citizenship & Diversity
- Human Rights
- Social Policy Across the Life Course

Each theme has a leader who is committed to achieving real change in his or her field. Cutting across these themes, the MSEI supports research which addresses the needs of population sectors where disadvantage may be experienced by reason of gender, age and/or disability.

The contribution of those who have lived experience of social inequities is essential to our work. The MSEI facilitates partnerships with community organisations and service providers in order to ensure the perspectives of those who have experienced disadvantage are central to research development. Such partnerships will continue to be supported and formalised in ensuing years.

Dr Berhan Ahmed, President, Team Africa
Photo courtesy Kate O’Hara.
Some five years ago, the first seeds were planted for the development of what is now the Melbourne Social Equity Institute. The gestation period prior to the MSEI’s formal establishment in mid-2012 has meant that much of the important and potentially complementary research already being undertaken across the University of Melbourne under the broad banner of social equity was identified prior to my coming on board as Foundation Director in March 2013. This has made my role much easier than expected and I am exceptionally grateful to the Interim (and now Deputy) Director Professor Julie McLeod, Executive Officer Charlene Edwards, the theme leaders and the members of the reference group for being so welcoming. Kathleen Patterson, with whom I have worked for the better part of ten years, agreeing to becoming the MSEI’s project co-ordinator has also been of invaluable assistance in my taking up the directorship.

The main aims of the MSEI over the past year were to raise its profile both within and outside the university and to concentrate on building social equity research capacity. The addition of a part-time Communications Officer, Gary Dickson, to the directorate has been instrumental in establishing a social media presence and numerous seminars, forums, lectures and our inaugural conference have all helped build the MSEI’s profile and showcase the important interdisciplinary work already under way.

Over the past year the MSEI seed funded eight interdisciplinary projects and brought in significant funding from the National Mental Health Commission for a project dealing with how best to reduce the use of seclusion and restraint of individuals with severe mental health problems. It has also established networks for those researching in the disparate (but often interconnecting) areas of disability, family violence and gender as well as for those working on projects involving children.

An advisory board, constituted by members outside of the university and chaired by Jan Owen AM, has been established to ensure that research supported by the MSEI translates into policy and practice. In all, this has been a year in which all involved with the MSEI have hit the ground running.

The MSEI is now well on its way to achieving its vision to influence government policy, public opinion and social practices through the highest quality scholarship in order to create fairer societies.

Professor Bernadette McSherry
Foundation Director
Directorate

Professor Bernadette McSherry
Foundation Director

Bernadette joined the University of Melbourne from Monash University, where she was an Australian Research Council Federation Fellow and the Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Law and Mental Health. Bernadette has made significant scholarly contributions to the areas of criminal law, mental health law and psychology.

Professor Julie McLeod
Deputy Director

Julie is a professor at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and an Australian Research Council Future Fellow. Her research areas encompass youth and gender studies, curriculum history, feminism and education. Her Future Fellowship project is exploring youth identity and educational inequality since 1950.

Charlene Edwards
Executive Officer

Charlene has a background in partnership development and community engagement within the UK higher education sector. She holds an honours degree in music and drama from Royal Holloway, University of London, and a Graduate Certificate in Marketing from the Chartered Institute of Marketing. Charlene has recently joined the Community Advisory Committee for the Royal Women’s Hospital.

Kathleen Patterson
Project Co-ordinator

Kathleen joined the University of Melbourne from Monash University, where she was the Executive Officer of the Centre for the Advancement of Law and Mental Health. Kathleen has a Bachelor of Computing (Information Systems) from Monash and previously worked as an IT systems administrator in the USA and New Zealand.

Gary Dickson
Communications Officer

Gary is a graduate student of journalism at the University of Melbourne. His thesis is looking at comparative coverage of men’s public and private violence in print media. His undergraduate studies were in history and Spanish and he previously worked in communications at La Trobe University.
Theme Leaders

Professor Helen Sullivan
Social Policy Across the Life Course

Helen is the Director of the Melbourne School of Government. Her work examines theories and practices of collaboration in democratic governance (particularly at the local level). She has extensive experience evaluating government bodies and publishes widely on relationships between the state and society.

Associate Professor John Tobin
Human Rights

John is an Associate Professor in the Melbourne Law School where he researches and teaches in the area of human rights. He has a particular interest in children’s rights and economic and social rights. He is currently working on an ARC Discovery Project entitled ‘Children’s Rights: From Theory to Practice’.

Dr Deborah Warr
Citizenship and Diversity

Deborah is a sociologist and Senior Research Fellow at the McCaughey Centre for Community Health and Wellbeing. Deborah’s work has spanned locational disadvantage, refugees, the social determinants of health and more. She has a long-standing commitment to participatory and collaborative research.

Associate Professor Carolyn Whitzman
Access to Public Goods

Carolyn is an Associate Professor in Urban Planning in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning. Her research interests include building healthy, equitable cities, planning tools for violence prevention, community safety and overcoming barriers to affordable housing in the central city.
The MSEI is advised by an external board of prominent Australians with practical experience of working with diverse social groups, and a reference group, which includes our directorate, theme leaders and University of Melbourne academics with demonstrated strengths in social equity research.

Advisory Board

Jan Owen AM (Chair)  
CEO, Foundation for Young Australians

Hugh Evans  
CEO, Global Poverty Project

Durkhanai Ayubi  
Australian Communications and Media Authority

Roz Hansen  
Former Chair, Metropolitan Planning Strategy

Robin Banks  
Anti-Discrimination Commissioner (Tasmania)

Michael Traill AM  
CEO, Social Ventures Australia

Michael Black AC QC  
Former Chief Justice, Federal Court of Australia

Reference Group

Professor Sean Cooney  
Melbourne Law School

Professor Guyonne Kalb  
Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research

Dr John Furler  
General Practice

Professor John Murphy  
Faculty of Arts

Associate Professor Louise Harms  
Department of Social Work
Research Themes

Access to Public Goods
This theme examines how spatial access to public goods affects social equity. In order to create the best chances for individual and community wellbeing, a healthy community needs:

1. adequate, diverse, and affordable housing for individuals and families;
2. easy walking, cycling and public transport access to employment and educational opportunities;
3. public open space and other recreational, cultural and leisure opportunities;
4. a range of health and social infrastructure;
5. healthy food; as well as
6. local democracy and community capacity.

This theme supports research which promotes access to these goods and services.

Human Rights
In contemporary discussions about justice, the discourses of human rights and social equity are frequently heard. For example, UNICEF has recently adopted an equity approach to matters involving children, which is said to be grounded in human rights. But such a policy masks deep and enduring dilemmas about the meaning (or meanings) of ‘equity’ and ‘human rights’ and the relationship between these concepts. Is human rights a means to achieve social equity or is equity merely one of many principles that inform the idea of human rights? Are both concepts preoccupied with a utopian dream that fails to address the practical dilemmas of scarce resources and political realism? Or do they offer a vision by which to navigate these realities? This theme supports research which examines these questions.

Citizenship and Diversity
The Citizenship and Diversity theme examines issues of cultural identity, social diversity, community, migration and legal pluralism.

This theme aims to foster research to understand processes contributing to socio-economic and cultural exclusion, marginalisation and disenfranchisement. It also supports research promoting social cohesion and inclusive citizenship in contemporary heterogeneous, multicultural and globalizing societies.

Social Policy Across the Life Course
This theme examines the impact of governmental action on the lives of individuals and their communities. It embraces a broad conception of social policy that includes any or all interventions that have an impact on individual and community welfare and wellbeing while paying particular attention to those individuals or groups who experience entrenched disadvantage. This theme tries to assess the impact of policy interventions across the life course in order to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the interconnections between policy action and life choices reflected through individual experiences, social relations and policy and service systems.
Seed-funded projects

Access to Public Goods

The Citizens’ Agenda: Exploring ways of improving political news coverage and increasing political engagement
Project led by Dr Margaret Simons (Centre for Advancing Journalism)

The Citizens’ Agenda is a practice-based research project, which was conducted in the lead up to the 2013 federal election. Its aims are to assess the potential of new media technologies for promoting civic participation, and for promoting forms of journalism practice that extend and enhance democratic engagement amongst diverse population groups. It involves asking citizens (through social media, meetings, publications and broadcasts) what issues they wish candidates in their electoral district to address – and then having those candidates address these issues at a public form reported on by the media. The impact of this process is being analysed.

Understanding place-based racism and fostering local interculturalism
Project led by Dr Deborah Warr (School of Population and Global Health)

Contemporary Australia is a highly multicultural society where support for multiculturalism co-exists with racist and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in ways that have been described as ‘unsettled multiculturalism’. The significance of place-based contexts for the ways in which racism manifests or multiculturalism is embraced has generally received scant research attention. Available evidence suggests it is important to understand the complex variations across place contexts and apply this in tailoring effective anti-racism strategies and messages. The project aims to generate improved insights into how socio-economic-spatial settings frame intercommunal tensions and local racisms and explore effective strategies for promoting positive interculturalism.
Seed-funded projects

Citizenship and Diversity

Understanding female genital cutting in inner Melbourne
Project led by Dr Cathy Vaughan (Centre for Women’s Health)

In inner Melbourne there are significant numbers of residents from countries where female genital cutting (FGC, also known as female genital mutilation) is common. Despite changes in patterns of immigration to Victoria, and in FGC practices in affected communities’ countries of origin, little research has been conducted into local communities’ knowledge, beliefs, practices and health-service experiences in relation to FGC in the last ten years. Researchers from the Centre for Women’s Health, Gender and Society (MSPH) and Melbourne Law School are working with North Yarra Community Health and The Royal Women’s Hospital to increase understanding about FGC to inform health services.

The F Word: Cross-disciplinary feminist art in Australia
Project led by Associate Professor Barbara Bolt

The F word is a unique, collaborative research project that emerges from the resurgent interest in feminist art practice in Australia today. Through research, workshops and dialogue with contemporary artists, the project aims to make public and redress the inequity of female artists in public galleries and restore and make accessible an archive of feminist art overlooked by the art historical canon. With a focus on regional centres the F Word is building and developing dialogue and community between regions, generations and cultures. In commissioning new work, the project will uncover, materialize and make public current feminist thinking through interdisciplinary creative arts.

Imagining Muslim Women: examining the effects of images in women’s human rights campaigns
Project led by Dr Maree Pardy (Gender Studies)

This project will examine the content and effects of images used in contemporary human rights campaigns of Muslim and ‘other’ women. It aims to provide new insights into two major fields:

1. human rights – how and why such images drive global human rights campaigns; and
2. citizenship – how these images enable and constrain the participation of Muslim and immigrant women in public life in Australia.
Seed-funded projects

Human Rights

The lived-experience of refugee-background children in Australia
Project led by Karen Block (McCaughey VicHealth Centre for Community Wellbeing)

This project is a collaboration between Save the Children (STC) and researchers experienced in child public health; migrant and refugee history, policy and settlement; and early childhood education. It aims to operationalise human rights approaches to research and practice – bringing young children’s perspectives, insights and voices into the knowledge created about them. It uses innovative participatory visual and mobile methods to engage young refugee-background children and parents participating in STC’s supported playgroups in an exploration of their lives and circumstances following resettlement in Melbourne. The project will increase understanding of the complex processes required for social inclusion, and inform the provision of appropriate supports for these families by services and policy-makers.

How are low protection workers regulated?
Project led by Professor Sean Cooney (Melbourne Law School)

This project is a preliminary investigation of the norms that govern workers who lie outside the scope of labour standards laws (in either a legal or practical sense). Such workers generally receive lower levels of protection in respect of their remuneration, working time and leave entitlements than those covered by labour laws. They also have limited or no access to dispute resolution and enforcement processes that assist those covered by formal work law. The researchers are conducting pilot studies in the food services industries in Australia and Indonesia (where low protection workers vastly outnumber those covered by labour laws).
Seed-funded projects

Social Policy Across the Life Course

Enabling socially-inclusive and ethical visual methodologies
Project led by Associate Professor Marilys Guillemin (School of Population and Global Health)

Social equity research requires methodologies that must be innovative, yet rigorous and ethical. Visual methodologies and arts-based research have been shown to successfully engage vulnerable communities and address social equity challenges. This project brings together visual and arts-based researchers who are successfully employing innovative research methodologies and knowledge engagement strategies. The relevant elements of what makes these methodologies successful and appropriate in addressing social equity challenges are being determined and from this, best practice methodological guidelines will be developed. This project will assist researchers wanting to use visual and arts-based research, as well as ethics committees which review projects utilizing these methodologies.

Assessing and building social investment opportunities that preserve indigenous culture
Project led by Associate Professor Brad Potter (Department of Accounting)

This research examines how corporate social investment in its various forms can be best utilized to support Aboriginal art centres and thus the autonomy, health, education and employment outcomes in under-resourced Australian communities. In doing so, it explores the potential for such programs to enable more members of communities to remain in situ, preserving communities, cultures and customs. This in turn assists in allowing the focus of social policy in these communities to shift from providing basic support to improving the quality of outcomes.

Revisiting disadvantage: supporting new strength-based approaches to belonging and social inclusion for young people in education
Project led by Professor Johanna Wyn (Youth Research Centre)

For over a quarter of a century the same groups of young people have fared badly in education. The Bradley Review (2008) identified the need for tertiary education to address the poor representation of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, young people with a disability, Indigenous people and young people from rural areas as especially underrepresented in universities. This project analyses existing data bases, drawing on inter-disciplinary perspectives, to catalyse new thinking about the ways in which disadvantaged groups of young people access resources. Taking a strength-based approach, it will generate new knowledge about the ways in which the ‘at risk’ are connected, and will identify the diversity of institutional and learning processes that are positively enabling for disadvantaged young people.
Featured Projects

Sharing Place, Learning Together: Supporting sustainable educational partnerships to advance social equity

Project led by Dr Ken Winkel (Australian Venom Research Unit, Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences) & Dr Sally Godinho (Melbourne Graduate School of Education)

This project is situated within an interdisciplinary education program developed by the Australian Venom Research Unit and the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. It addresses sociocultural barriers to equity of participation and outcomes in school and tertiary studies through sharing knowledge and documenting new insights into working with Indigenous communities and educators. Connecting with a remote Indigenous school, the project seeks to draw out new insights into capacity building, and the role partnerships play in supporting Indigenous education, identifying mutual benefits and outcomes. The main aim of this project is to augment Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies within the Science, Medical and Education Faculties.

In November 2013 students from Maningrida College spent a week experiencing Melbourne life as part of the partnership with the University. It included visits to Bundoora College and Nossal High School, an art workshop at the National Gallery of Victoria, science activities at the Melbourne Zoo, and presentations at a university workshop.

The project team supported the college in a successful application for an NAB Schools First grant to help improve vocational outcomes for students at the school.
Featured Projects

Best Practice in Reducing or Eliminating Seclusion and Restraint in Mental Health Facilities

Project led by Professor Bernadette McSherry (Melbourne Social Equity Institute)

Seclusion and restraint are measures permitted for use in mental health services to manage a person’s behaviour. The term “seclusion” is generally defined in mental health legislation and refers to the deliberate confinement of a person, alone, in a room or area that the person cannot freely exit.

The term “restraint” encompasses bodily force or devices (such as straps, safety vests, blankets or mittens) used to control a person's freedom of movement as well as the situation where medication is given primarily to control a person's behaviour.

There has long been concern about the (over)use of restraint and seclusion in mental health care. Academic literature has noted a number of adverse consequences for those subjected to seclusion and restraint and raised concerns with human rights breaches.

The National Mental Health Commission has funded a team of interdisciplinary researchers from across the University of Melbourne and led by Professor Bernadette McSherry to identify evidence of how best to reduce the use of seclusion and restraint in mental health facilities. With the participation of people with lived experience, their families, friends and supporters as well as practitioners and other service providers working in a range of mental health, general health, custodial and community settings, the project aims to:

1. identify and assess the drivers behind current practice in Australia;
2. provide examples of how seclusion and restraint practices have been reduced or eliminated; and
3. discuss options for reducing and eliminating the use of seclusion and restraint in relation to mental health issues in Australia.

The project team comprises twelve researchers representing the disciplines of nursing, social work, law, education, psychology and psychiatry. The project is collecting data from an online survey and twelve focus groups as well as analysing the current academic literature in the field. It has established two advisory groups which consist of people who have experienced seclusion or restraint themselves and carers, families or friends of people who have experienced seclusion or restraint. Each group consists of six people who are continuously engaged with the research team and who provide input throughout all stages of the project development.

A report will be submitted to the National Mental Health Commission at the end of August 2014.
PhD students

Recipients of Strategic Australian Postgraduate Awards

Joanna Minster
What are effective ways of addressing cyber-racism for children and young people?
Supervisor: Dr Naomi Priest, McCaughey VicHealth Centre for Community Wellbeing

Katie Lamb
Embedding the voices of children and young people in the development of programs for violent fathers
Supervisor: Prof Cathy Humphreys, School of Social Work

Lauren Kosta
Recovery from disaster: the roles of social equity and social inclusion
Supervisor: A/Prof Louise Harms, School of Social Work

Liz Gill-Atkinson
How do women with disability in the Philippines understand and experience participatory research practice?
Supervisors: Dr Cathy Vaughan, Gender and Women's Health Unit & Prof Marilys Guillemin, Academic Centre for Health Equity

Melissa Murphy
Filling the ‘tragic gap’ with music
Supervisors: A/Prof Katrina Skewes McFerran, National Music Therapy Research Unit & Dr Nick Hagiliassis, Scope Victoria

Australian Postgraduate Award Top-Up Recipients

Gemma McKibbin
Sexually Abusive Behaviour by Young People: Supporting Victoria’s Prevention Response
Supervisor: Prof Cathy Humphreys, School of Social Work

Naomi Pfitzner
Engaging New Fathers: Learning from Baby Makes Three
Supervisors: Prof Kelsey Hegarty, General Practice & Prof Cathy Humphreys, School of Social Work
Partnerships & Collaborations

The MSEI is committed to engaging with organisations, communities and individuals to co-design and develop research. Developing relationships is integral to who we are and what we do.

The MSEI is involved in a number of the University’s key partnerships, including:

- **Brotherhood of St Laurence** – the MSEI staff and theme leaders have had a relationship with the BSL for a number of years. The MSEI has representation on the Partnership Board, as well as the operational working group and has supported new projects with the BSL in 2013. These include a literature review to examine the cumulative impacts of disadvantage and vulnerabilities on mid-life/older women and a seed funded project to examine the impact of stress on children’s health, wellbeing and development.

- **Departments of Health (North West Metro Region) and Human Services (North)** – the MSEI joined the Partnership Governance Committee in 2013 and has actively contributed to the development of joint research projects in the areas of refugee and asylum seeker health and wellbeing and preventing family violence.

- **The Smith Family** – the MSEI joined the partnership board in 2013, which is led by the Office for Student Equity. There are a number of teaching and learning initiatives that have been developed through the partnership, and the partners are now seeking to strengthen and further develop the relationship through identifying and initiating joint research projects.

The MSEI has also engaged with organisations such as **North Yarra Community Health** through the University’s partnership with the Carlton community.

The MSEI has been developing relationships with organisations across our fields of interest, particularly:

- **Disability**: the MSEI has been developing a strategic relationship with **Scope Victoria**, which is due to be formalised in 2014. In 2013, the MSEI supported a collaborative PhD project through the provision of a Strategic Australian Postgraduate (STRAPA) scholarship between the Scope’s Community Inclusion team and the University’s National Music Therapy Research Unit.

- **Prevention of Violence Against Women**: The MSEI has engaged with organisations such as the **Domestic Violence Resource Centre** (which is a partner in a MSEI-funded seed grant), **VicHealth** and **White Ribbon**. The MSEI facilitated discussion and feedback between University academics and the team at the **City of Melbourne** who are developing the Melbourne City Council’s Prevention of Violence Against Women Strategy.

A number of organisations were involved in projects seed funded by the MSEI, including **Save the Children**, the **Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health** and the **Royal Women’s Hospital**.


Key Events

**Deliberative Democracy and Sustainable Transport**
Professor Peter Newman (Curtin University) delivered a lecture on new projects in India where deliberative democracy has been planned into street design.

**The Refugee Crisis: Is Manus Island the Solution?**
Organised in response to the then-government's announcement of the Papua New Guinea Solution this panel discussion featured lawyer David Manne and Professor Michelle Foster of the Melbourne Law School.

**Refugees for Asylum Seekers Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference**
This interdisciplinary conference accommodated postgraduate researchers, practitioners and policymakers working in refugee studies, followed by a book launch. Associate Professor Savitri Taylor (La Trobe University) delivered the keynote address.

**Interdisciplinary Disability Research Forum**
This research forum brought together 90 academics from across the University and was intended as a catalyst for exploring how to support and enhance disability research.

**The Citizens’ Agenda**
This research project culminated in a series of town-hall meetings in metropolitan and rural electorates across the country in the lead-up to the 2013 Federal Election. The final event, held in Melbourne, brought together Cath Bowtell, Adam Bandt and Sean Armistead to respond to the electorate’s questions.

**Imagining Muslim Women in Human Rights, Arts & Politics**
This half-day symposium brought together scholars of Law, Criminology, Gender and Islamic Studies to consider the way Muslim Women are represented in society.

**A Transformative Agenda for Global Health Justice**
Professor Lawrence O. Gostin (Georgetown University) spoke of his desire to see a transformation in the way international law responds to global health inequity.

**Where Are We Going? The future of Australian foreign aid**
Three presentations looked at the way in which Australia’s aid programme priorities are shifting under the new government and what we can expect over the next three years.
**Financial Statement**

**Balance brought forward from 2012**  
$435,220

### Income

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<td>Core Allocation</td>
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<td>Higher Ed Participation &amp; Partnership Program</td>
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### Expenditure

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<td>Directorate Salaries</td>
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<td>Operation Expenses</td>
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<td>Interdisciplinary Seed Grants</td>
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<td>PhD Scholarships (STRAPA top-ups)</td>
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<td>Other: Includes conference, event hosting, event sponsorship, academic visitors, meetings etc.</td>
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<td>Special: Includes relocation, equipment etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Expenditure Total</strong></td>
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**Balance carried forward to 2014**  
$13,167

### Income from External Sources

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<tr>
<td>National Mental Health Commission: Reduction of Seclusion &amp; Restraint Project</td>
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<td>Victorian Department of Health Mental Health Branch Consultancy</td>
<td>$17,500</td>
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<td>Mental Health Commission of New South Wales: Short Paper</td>
<td>$7,920</td>
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www.socialequity.unimelb.edu.au

Director
Professor Bernadette McSherry
t: +61 3 9035 7434
bernadette.mcsherry@unimelb.edu.au

Executive Officer
Charlene Edwards
t: +61 3 9035 4738

General Enquiries
social-equity@unimelb.edu.au

Address
Level 7, Arts West (Building 148)
Professor’s Walk
The University of Melbourne
Parkville VIC 3010, Australia