



Centre for Just Places

The Centre for Just Places was established by Jesuit Social Services, with significant seed funding from Gandel Philanthropy and the Victorian Government, to enable and support place-based approaches nationally through research, collaboration, engagement and knowledge exchange.

Aims

The Centre aims to:

- Demonstrate leadership in research and advocacy on place-based inequities and injustice.
- Focus on addressing the root causes of social, economic and environmental inequity and injustice
- Promote a social and ecological justice lens in place-based research and action, and
- Collaborate and partner with communities and cross-sectoral stakeholders to support and enable effective place-based approaches.

Research, Action and Advocacy

Three pillars support the work of the Centre for Just Places – Research, Action and Advocacy.

Research

The Centre's research aims to:

- Progress understanding of, and solutions to, locational disadvantage and social exclusion through an interdisciplinary research agenda.
- Draw together data and concepts across community development, social services, health, urban and social planning, economic development, environmental justice, climate change and innovation.

- Undertake action research with at-risk and vulnerable communities to design, test and evaluate place-based projects and programs.
- Create an accessible repository and national hub for information and knowledge exchange on place-based policy, programs, evaluations, tools, case studies and practices.
- Initiate research collaborations to bridge knowledge gaps and empower communities in the design and implementation of place-based approaches.
- Promote a social and ecological justice lens in place-based research and action.
- Lead our Dropping off the Edge research into entrenched place-based disadvantage.

Action

The Centre will:

- Enable and support community action and capacity building through sharing resources and knowledge to better understand local strengths, needs and opportunities as they design and implement place-based approaches to building resilience.

- Lead and support collaborations across sectors – community, business, government, and academia – to better understand, implement and evaluate place-based approaches to community resilience and empowerment.

Advocacy

- Communicate (to decision-makers, communities and stakeholders) the opportunity that place-based approaches present to strengthen community resilience.
- Advocate for policies and processes that empower and support communities mobilising a national conversation on the importance of place-based approaches for resilient, inclusive and regenerative communities.
- Draw on case studies of innovative and impactful place-based approaches to support further investment in such responses to locational disadvantage and resilience building.

What are place-based approaches?

Communities, service providers and all levels of government in Australia are increasingly adopting place-based approaches to empower communities to design and develop durable solutions to local problems, enhance connectedness and resilience, and, in communities of concentrated disadvantage, tackle causes of poverty and exclusion. While there is no fixed definition of a place-based approach, there is some consensus it should involve:

A collaborative, long-term approach to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic location. This approach is ideally characterised by partnering and shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impacts (Dart 2018: 7).

- Place-based approaches characteristically emerge, or are designed to respond to, complex, interrelated or challenging issues impacting 'at risk' communities. Leveraging local insights, skills and resources, place-based approaches address local social, health and environmental issues on their own terms and help build the capacity of communities as active participants and leaders in local decision-making processes. Such approaches aim to ensure reforms at the national and state-level are informed by local experience and implemented according to community need and expertise.
- Place-based approaches belong to a well-established network of practices that value community-driven change and transformation. Over the years, place-based approaches have been adopted to address localised needs in areas as diverse—and

connected—as disaster recovery, child development, Aboriginal self-determination, land-care, industry closure and economic renewal, regional healthcare, and crime prevention. The effectiveness and benefits of place-based approaches are widely recognised, as is the need for further development, research and evaluation to unlock their full potential.

Why Jesuit Social Services?

Jesuit Social Services has a deep understanding of place-based approaches through our extensive experience and expertise developed over many decades in Victoria, Australia and internationally. Our work with people on the margins draws our attention to the multiple and interrelated factors that cause disadvantage, diminish communities' capacity to shape their future, and damage the natural environment we all depend on.

Our Dropping Off the Edge research into inequality and place based disadvantage has provided us with valuable insights into the many ways that vulnerability is manifested and can be measured in a given location. These factors include high levels of unemployment, low levels of income, housing stress, high incidence of family violence and criminal offending (Vinson and Rawsthorne 2015).

We recognise the direct relationship between caring for people and caring for country and planet. We know that the most marginalised people in our community are also those worst affected by climate change. Much work needs to be done to improve the places and systems that shape our lives. Helping to sustain and regenerate the natural world must be at the heart of our work to build a just society.

Developing solutions to complex social and environmental challenges requires place-based approaches together with system wide interventions. Evidence suggests that only communities empowered to make their own decisions end up with solutions that truly have impact in the long term. Collaborative, inclusive, community led and owned initiatives are a defining feature of place-based approaches with self-determination an important principle.

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Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential.