The SISPRU Research Unit works under the direction of Associate Professor Philip Mendes and an Advisory Board comprised of prominent Australians. The Unit undertakes high quality applied social research from a social work/social welfare perspective with particular reference to income security, child welfare and child protection, illicit drugs and indigenous rights. SISPRU builds on its research record to constructively participate in community debate, and promote a knowledge base for improved policy practice.

SISPRU aims to promote public discussion on the development of fairer and more effective policies and programs for responding to social disadvantage; to investigate the relative influence of structural and individual factors on social exclusion; to examine the influence of lobby groups including the media and think tanks on policy development, and the associated impact of global policy factors and organizations; and to provide an opportunity for post-graduate students to be involved in inter-disciplinary social policy research and debate in partnership with government and non-government community service providers and policy advocates.

Associate Professor Philip Mendes teaches Social Policy and Community Development in the Department of Social Work at Monash University, and is Director of the Social Inclusion and Social Policy Research Unit (SISPRU). He is an expert on community welfare lobby groups, having completed his PhD on the peak community welfare lobby body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). He has also published widely on arrange of social policy and community development debates in peer reviewed academic journals, and is the author or co-author of six books including “Australia’s Welfare Wars” (UNSW Press 2003), Harm Minimisation, Zero Tolerance and Beyond: The politics of Illicit Drugs in Australia (Pearson, 2004), Inside the Welfare Lobby: A history of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) (Sussex Academic Press, 2006); and Australia’s Welfare Wars Revisited (UNSW Press, 2008). Philip is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for a number of academic journals including Community Development Journal (UK); International Journal of Social Welfare (Sweden) and Developing Practice and Social Alternatives.

For the last twelve years he has been engaged in ongoing research on policy and practice for young people transitioning from out of home care. The research has included a comparison of the leaving care supports available in Australian States (particularly Victoria and New South Wales), and also a comparison of Australia with the USA, UK and New Zealand. He is a member of the National Child Protection Framework Transitioning from Care Sub-Group, the Australian representative on the Transitions to Adulthood for Young People Leaving Public Care International Research Group, and co-authored “Young People leaving State out-of-home care; a research-based study of Australian policy and practice, published in 2011.
SISPRU RESEARCH UNIT ACTIVITIES

Current Funded Projects

1) Young people transitioning from out-of-home care: Examining interagency collaboration, leaving care plans and post-care support services for dual clients of child protection and youth justice commenced July 2011. Cash and in-kind industry partners are Office of Child Safety Commissioner, Berry St Victoria, Oz Child, Salvation Army, Jesuit Social Services, Youth Support and Advocacy Service and White Lion. Academic partner is Associate Professor Pamela Snow from Monash University Bendigo Clinical School. Lead funding is from Helen MacPherson Smith Trust ($93,000 grant over 3 years received in December 2011). Completed first round of interviews and focus group with key worker informants. Have undertaken over a dozen consultations with young people. Still keen to recruit more young people. Presented invited paper to National Juvenile Justice Summit held in Melbourne in March 2013. Articles submitted to Australian Social Work Special Issue, and Child Abuse Review.

2) Young people with a disability transitioning from out-of-home care – Partnership formed with 10 child welfare organisations providing cash and/or in-kind support, and funding of $42,000 from ANZ Trustees Felton Bequest. Have completed Phase One consultations with key workers from partner agencies. Phase One report will soon be completed, and we will then commence consultations with young people. Presented keynote paper to Community Living Association Transition from Care forum held in Brisbane in April 2013. Also invited to participate in Residential Care panel hosted by Centre for Excellence in May 2013, and invited to present paper on Leaving Care to National Out-of-home Care forum held in Melbourne in June 2013.

3) Three year Evaluation of Berry Street Victoria Stand by Me pilot program for Young people transitioning from out-of-home care pilot project – commenced in December 2012. Have completed literature review on UK Personal Advisers Model, and starting to develop evaluation methodology.


5) Literature review for Victorian leaving care longitudinal study. Contracted by Australian Institute of Family Studies. Draft has been completed.

Other Current or Forthcoming Activities

1) Social work and social activism – chapter was completed on Australia for edited book by John Gal, Social workers influencing social policy: an international perspective on policy practice, published by Policy Press in January 2013. In addition, a variant of this chapter was presented at an international conference “Researching policy practice in social work” hosted by the Social Work Department of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in late January, 2013. May be an opportunity to engage in comparative research over time using framework developed by Israeli PhD student.

2) Social work history – Commissioned analysis of social policy context of AASW Norma Parker addresses for special online issue of Australian Social Work. Waiting on reviewer reports.

3) Guest editing special issue of Australian Social Work on young people transitioning from out-of-home care. 15 submissions from all over world. Intended for publication in March 2014.
4) Analysis of the social welfare policies of the Australian Greens – paper has been submitted to *Social Alternatives*. Still waiting on outcome.

5) Study of the Australian newspaper’s war on the welfare state – paper was published in *Dissent Magazine* in December 2012.


**Further Planned/Potential activities in 2013**
(These may depend on availability of honours or PhD students committing to these projects)

1) Study of the history of the Australian Association of Social Workers regarding Indigenous Affairs – currently negotiating with AASW to attain access to archival material.


3) Study of AASW campaign for professional registration of social workers.

4) Study of the views of Australians living in poverty concerning income security policy – potential partnership with St Vincent de Paul.

**Current PhD students**

1) Doctoral student shared with GLASS Research Unit – A gender and class analysis of paid parental leave policy.

2) Doctoral student co-supervised by Dr Kerry Brydon – The influence of informal social support (Non-professional relationships) for young people transitioning from out-of-home care in Victoria and two other jurisdictions.

3) MSW and potential Doctoral student co-supervised by Dr Uschi Bay - Social work and Community Development in Schools in New Zealand

**Current honours students**

1) The housing experiences of young people transitioning from OHC in Victoria;

2) Stakeholder views on the City of Yarra Supervised Injecting Facilities debate.

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