



Kelley Johnson, Director of SPRC 2014–2016

Forty years is a great anniversary for both people and organisations. It is a time when we have had enough experience to acquire wisdom and to have hopefully enough future time to use it. The wisdom and knowledge gained by the SPRC over its forty years positions it to continue to make a valuable and important contribution not only to social policy and practice in Australia but also internationally.

It was a privilege to be a professor and director at the SPRC. In reflecting on this anniversary, I read Adam Graycar's account of its beginning forty years ago. The sense of excitement that is so evident in his statement is still there as people continue to develop new areas of work, challenge and support each other and question existing policies. However, the SPRC has now also added years in which it has formed long lasting positive relationships with community and government organisations in Australia and collaborative engagements with other academic institutions. This has enabled increased possibilities for social change and for research having an impact on the lives of people who have participated in it or about whom it has been undertaken. In my own area of research with people with disabilities, the National Disability Insurance Scheme has involved radical change in the way they receive support. Ongoing research at SPRC in relation to the NDIS has been able to provide input which can challenge and support its implementation. Such research which is independent and which involves active participation by people with disabilities in its development makes an important contribution both nationally and internationally. This approach is evident across the many different areas of social policy in which SPRC is involved.

The past and present at SPRC are to be celebrated. The future has some challenges. Cutbacks in government funding make it more difficult to sustain innovative and important research which contributes to both theory and practice in relation to social policy. The independence of the research undertaken by researchers is challenged if there is a reliance on research funded by tenders alone. The need for research centres which can sustain long term research, develop knowledge which is theoretically and empirically sound is important. SPRC has had a strong and continuing role in teaching and mentoring early career researchers contributing expertise and innovation to its research development. However, in the current environment this support may be more difficult to maintain.

While like many other people who care for universities as a 'public good' I am concerned about their future, I also have trust in the strength and integrity of the academics who work at SPRC to pursue work which contributes to greater social justice for citizens in Australia and internationally. I look forward to its fiftieth celebration.