



Adam Graycar, Director of SPRC 1980–1985

Exactly 40 years after I established the SPRC, the University of Adelaide appointed me to establish a new Institute for public policy. In the intervening years I had been the Director (or similar title) of six other organisations or agencies. All were in the knowledge business – some developed knowledge, some transmitted knowledge, some put knowledge into practice. Understanding public policy was the thread that ran through them and bound the activities loosely together. After 40 years one would have thought that I had policy processes and policy knowledge in my DNA. Yet the current challenges seemed as fresh and as complex as ever.

My new Institute at the University of Adelaide is the Stretton Institute, named after Hugh Stretton who in the early days was a frequent visitor to the SPRC. Stretton was a very clear thinker and a passionate advocate, and social justice firmly underpinned his academic and practical contribution. My first message for readers is that your policy endeavour requires clarity of goals and a commitment to well being. Good policy creates better lives.

We live in a world shaped by volatility and uncertainty, and framed by ambiguity. What seems to some people to be the right thing to do is opposed by others. Everything the SPRC studies, everything in public policy and in social policy is complex, convoluted and contested. There are no easy fixes, and my second message is that clear evidence, or the right answer is a necessary, but not a sufficient solution to the problem at hand. Political issues shape outcomes.

To make sure that good policy creates better lives we need to appreciate that some issues change rapidly and some don't change at all. We always want to ensure safety, security and dignity for the population. We want to make sure our diverse population can strive for high standards of living while preserving our environment for the future; that our education system provides the most appropriate education for our kids; that quality housing is attainable for all; that there is clean water for everybody when you turn on the tap. These things don't change. However what changes are answers to questions such as who should pay for these things? Who should deliver certain services? Should the rich pay the same as the poor? Should government steer more and row less or vice-versa? My third message is to focus on the outcome, yet appreciate the most feasible means of getting there. The means may change, but the outcome is important.

Over the years the SPRC has focused on how people live and has had a great deal of success in framing issues, researching problems, developing data and proposing solutions. As Henry Kissinger once said, each success only buys an admission ticket to a more difficult problem. This is my fourth message for the SPRC - your job is never done.

You have had 40 years of tremendous achievement. I hope that the next 40 are just as productive.