

The role & consequences of charity in responding to poverty & homelessness

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What do we
mean by
'charity'?

- Charity has many meanings (legal, theological, etc)
- We define it as *the voluntary giving of money, resources, or time to non-kin or non-friends*
- Focused on 'bottom-up' responses to poverty
- Don't included contracted welfare services provided by NGOs

Charity's growing prominence

- Charity increasingly prominent in societal responses to poverty
- Growth in food charities in developed countries (incl UK, US, Japan & Australia)¹
- Growing reliance on charity by people in poverty²

¹ Feeding America (2014); Kimura (2018); Lambie-Mumford (2017); Lambie-Mumford & Silvestro, (2020); McKay & Lindberg (2019)

² Parsell, Clarke, & Perales (2021).



Homelessness charity boom

- Also boom in bottom-up homelessness charities³
- Largely ameliorative
- Providing basic amenities to people on the street

³ Parsell & Watts (2017)



News • Weird News • Homelessness

Barmy Brexit Party candidate says wheelie-bin bed can solve Britain's homeless problem

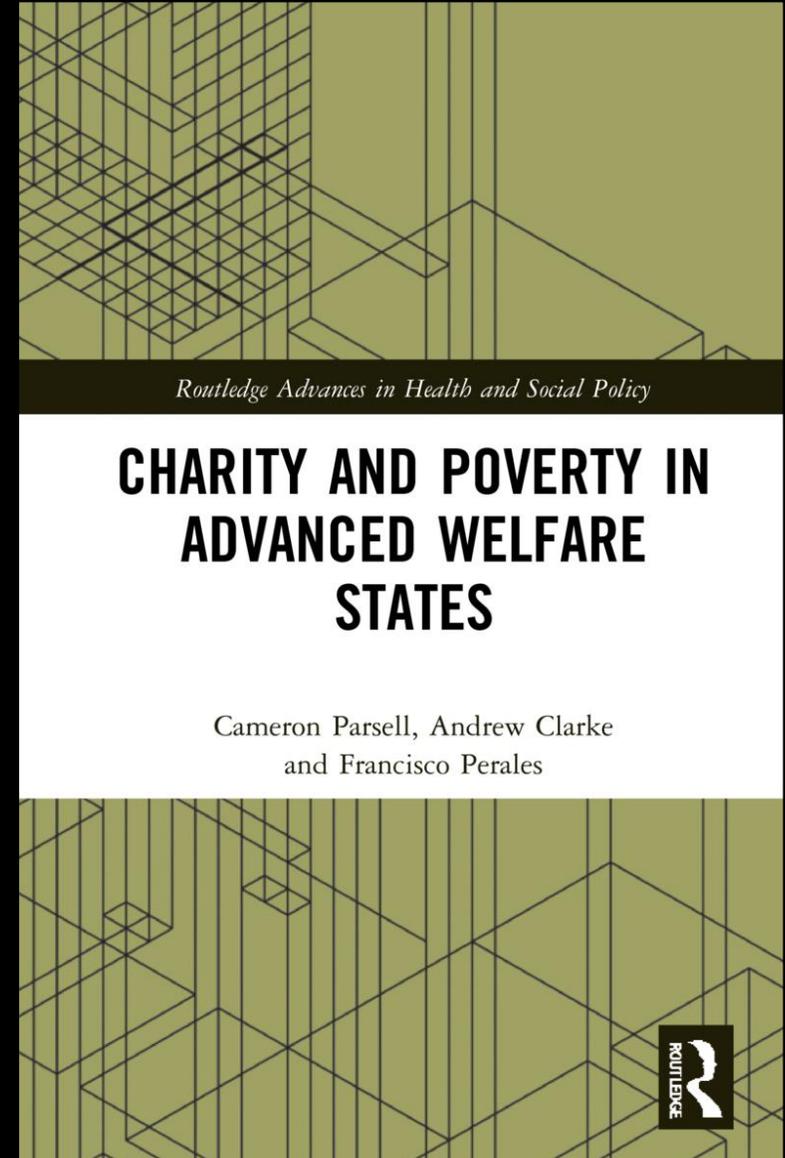
Peter Dawe says his 'sleep pod' will keep rough sleepers dry at night but admits his 'genius' idea of putting the homeless in rubbish bins has horrified some people.

By Tom Bevan
18.29.5 FEB 2020



Our research

- We examine resurgence of charity in our recent book
- Animated by moral complexity of charity
- What's charity's role in contemporary societal responses to poverty?
- How is it understood/perceived?
- What are its consequences?
- How can it be transformed to help end poverty?





Charity's role in poverty responses

- Inextricably related to changes in welfare provision & levels of poverty
- Welfare cuts worsen poverty, increase reliance on charity
- Redirecting of government funding & support for charity
- The problems charity addresses have a structural basis

Charity's meaning

- Public understandings foreground significance for giver & society
- Celebrate givers' compassion & ingenuity
- Charity promoted as cultivating resilient communities, solidarity
- Consequences for people in poverty largely overlooked; positive outcomes assumed

Young Australians of the Year see Orange Sky charity boom 12 months on from award

By James Fettes

Posted Tue 24 Jan 2017 at 3:36pm



Brisbane carpark turned into pop-up shelter for the homeless is changing lives already

Lucy Quaggin and Erin Edwards • 7NEWS • Published: Monday, 14 October 2019 3:23 PM AEDT





Charity's consequences

- Recipients' perspective provides insights into charity's consequences
- Charity central to many recipients' survival strategies
- Use charity to supplement inadequate welfare payments
- Helps alleviate symptoms of structural problems

RESEARCHER: What drives your need to come here?

GOUGH: Well, to put it bluntly, "f*ck all" money. Rent is \$500 a fortnight and I get paid \$680. (Gough, research participant)



Charity's consequences

- However, receipt of charity is shameful experience
- Linked to feeling passive & dependent; inability to reciprocate
- This is somewhat built into the charity relationship
- However, shame can be exacerbated by volunteers through interrogation, judgement
- Can also be attenuated by non-judgemental acceptance, unconditional support

“It’s the most degrading thing to have to do. Honestly, you feel like a real bum. It’s horrible.” (Julia, research participant)

Transforming charity

- While charity cannot address poverty alone, it can play a role
- However, role must be based on needs of recipient



Advocating for structural change

- Many established charity's do this, but the 'new bread' often do not
- Charitable in auspicious position to advocate for structural change
- Esteemed social position provides a platform for advocacy
- More freedom than orgs providing contracted services
- Bear witness to everyday struggles of people in poverty
- Form relationships as basis for solidarity & struggle

Transforming charitable encounters

- Charity should also continue to provide direct support/relief
- However, this should be done in a way that minimises shame
- This may include providing access to support with few conditions
- Ability for people to tell their story in their own words
- Focus on strengths as well as struggles
- Provide opportunities for reciprocity



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