

HARVEY AND THE HOMELESS

How about we invest in hope?

SO BILLIONAIRE Gerry Harvey has lamented that Australian charity is being wasted on “no-hoppers”. Well, how about we provide some hope? There is no doubt that many Australian families are trapped in poverty. At VicRelief Foodbank we hear the stories from welfare agencies every day. Families trapped by increasing utility costs; making choices between paying the mortgage or buying dinner; bereft of support for a child with mental health problems; even, occasionally, a family sucked into buying appliances they couldn't afford by a promise of no interest until 2010.

This is Australia's subprime crisis. When you're caught in the poverty trap, it does feel hopeless. And worse, billionaires and others remind you that you are without hope. Pretty soon you come to believe you are a no-hoper. Once hope is gone, you feel truly trapped. Well, how about we restore hope?

Almost every agency that comes through our doors at VicRelief Foodbank knows how to release people from the poverty trap. It takes an investment in time, compassion and discernment — time to understand what causes a family to ask for welfare all the time. And that time costs money. And while the money is sometimes there to provide food, there is nothing like the money needed to pay someone to sit and listen.

Ask any church with a welfare program. The local baker will give them bread to hand out to the poor. But who is giving them money to pay someone to help homeless people develop life skills that will move them out of dependence?

How about we get serious about investing in the people and processes that create hope and solutions for the “no-hoppers”.

Philip Hunt, CEO, VicRelief Foodbank