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Practical Social Inclusion: Beyond the Lip Service

Communities in Control Conference
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Presentation by



Dr Jonathon Welch, AM
Director, Choir of Hope and Inspiration

Thank you very much. Good afternoon everybody from all the far corners of our magnificent country and beyond. It's a real pleasure to have the opportunity to be here with you this afternoon and, in particular, to have the choir invited to come and perform for you.

It's certainly been a very interesting journey the last couple of years since the Choir of Hard Knocks was created. But before that I'd actually created the Sydney Street Choir in October 2001. They've now been going for almost nine years. So I've been doing this work for almost a decade, which is indeed a great joy. I really feel that I've now found my place in life in many ways, bringing together all my various musical skills and the experience that I've had.

We've in fact just performed for the Melbourne International Jazz Festival with Kate Ceberano at Hamer Hall. That style of collaboration just goes to show the possibilities that are there, and indeed the capabilities of the choir members. Given half the chance, look at what people can actually achieve in their lives if they're given the opportunity and a safe place where they can express themselves and move forward positively. It's been a really, really wonderful experience for them and indeed a great honour and privilege for me to have the chance to work with them.

I've just finished implementing some choir programs into the women's prison system here in Victoria, which you'll see a little bit later on the ABC and which was again an amazing experience. I've now created a foundation called the School of Hard Knocks Foundation, which I'm looking at getting funds to create more of these programs in the women's and men's prison systems.

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My passion for social inclusion doesn't stop with my opportunity to use my skills to create choirs. In the last week of November this year, from 23 to 29 November, I am creating Social Inclusion Week, in conjunction with government, not-for-profit organisations, Apex, Rotary, Lions Clubs, the corporate sector and Our Community. I think this is a very, very important opportunity for us all to really explain to the public at large what social inclusion means, and to emphasise the detriment to our society and our community that is created by social exclusion.

The highlighting and celebrating event for that week, which will be the last weekend in November (and I'm hoping it will become an annual weekend on our calendar) will be the National Street Party Weekend.

In fact, it's your responsibility to create this; all I've done is come up with the concept. I really think it's an opportunity for us to engage with those people directly around us and with other communities that we don't normally get a chance to bring into our lives and into our communities – whether it's in your own neighbourhood, in your own workplace, or in your own school.

I'm really, really excited about having the chance to kick start that event, even more during these really difficult economic times that we're having. There is no more important time for us than now to work together at grassroots level and really support each and every one of us.

I'm speaking to the converted here at this conference – in fact I feel I'm with kindred spirits with all of you in the room here today. So I just want to thank you very much for the opportunity to come and be part of this conference. I want to say how much your work is

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extraordinary and how much your work is valued. I feel that I'm just doing my little bit with what I can do with my knowledge and my skills with music. Hopefully I'm a good ambassador for all of you as well as the music industry in Australia.

Without ado I'd now like you to welcome the choir formally known as the Choir of Hard Knocks, for the very first time to perform for you as the Choir of Hope and Inspiration.

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