

## PREPUBLICATION VERSION

### **Social Enterprise: Is it the Business of Social Work?**

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#### **Abstract**

The paper explores the relevance of social enterprise to social work practice and policy development. Social enterprise refers to a broad set of approaches that use business acumen to address social goals. Long a marginal activity in social work, recently social enterprise has been thrust into the spotlight in debates about the future of social policy and community services. It is important that social workers understand the meaning and implications of social enterprise if they are to apply it critically and reflectively in practice and participate in contemporary debates about its relevance in promoting individual and community empowerment. The paper provides an overview of the meaning of social enterprise, outlines the reasons for the renewed focus on social enterprise and related concepts in social policy debates, particularly community economic development, and examines its underlying values. It concludes with a discussion of questions and concerns surrounding the implementation of social enterprise in Australia.

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**Key words:** Social enterprise; community services sector; social work practice; social policy

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Social enterprise has undergone a meteoric rise to prominence in debates about the future of social policy and community services in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. In Australia, in a very short space of time, it has become a hotly debated topic among commentators in public, practice and academic domains (Botsman and Latham 2001; Crofts and Gray 2001; Fitzgerald 2000; Healy 2001; Horin 2001; McDonald and Marston 2001; Simons 2001; Zappala 2001). At stake in these debates is the future of the welfare state and

current practices within the social services, not only in the provision of material and social aid but also in the promotion of active citizenship among service users, many of whom are the most marginalised members of our society. Yet, social enterprise is not a new idea in the community services field. Indeed, a range of community services, from small consumer advocacy groups to large charities, have developed through, and continue to use, entrepreneurial strategies both to ensure their continued survival and to promote the social and economic interests of the communities with which they work. Social workers involved in community development initiatives with impoverished communities have been strong advocates of social enterprise (Gray 1997; Midgley 1996; Raheim 1996) though, on the whole, it has been a marginal theme in professional social work in Australia. Nonetheless, as social enterprise becomes increasingly important in community services policy and practice, it is important that social workers become familiar with it. Our position is that social enterprise can extend options and choices available to service users, but that it should be seen as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, government involvement in social service provision and structural change.

### **Defining social enterprise**

Social enterprise refers to activities undertaken in the public interest using entrepreneurial strategies (Simons, cited in Zappala 2001). It embraces the idea that business acumen can be applied to community causes to achieve a transfer of economic and social resources to disadvantaged groups and individuals (Crofts and Gray 2001; De Leonardis and Mauri 1992). According to Zappala (2001), 'social enterprise is a means for nonprofit agencies to maximise their mission-related performance through the development of new ventures or by reorganising activities to improve operational efficiency' (p. 43). It refers to a broad range of activities, including community economic development, profit generating activities undertaken by non-profits to support service initiatives, cross-sectoral partnerships, and private sector social responsibility programs (Catford 1998; Dees & Haus 1998; Henton et al 1997; Reis 1999).

Community economic development and related activities, such as micro-enterprise development, are well-established strategies for achieving social and economic

development in impoverished communities (Church, Fontan, Lachance and Shragge 2000; Raheim 1996). Examples of initiatives of this type include micro-credit schemes, local employment co-operatives, city farms, and community cafes, restaurants, and Laundromats. Despite minimal profits, these initiatives offer increased access to material and social resources for individuals and communities (Mawson 2001).

For-profit activities in non-profit community service organisations constitute a second form of social enterprise. The range of profit generating initiatives is broad and includes well-established fundraising activities, such as 'op-shops', through to the establishment of consultancy units drawing on the expertise of staff in community service agencies, such as those offering fee-for-service counselling to industry groups. The profits generated through these activities can enhance the autonomy of community service agencies by enabling them to undertake initiatives and projects not tied to specific funding programs.

Another type of social enterprise activity involves cross-sectoral partnerships between communities, community agencies, business, and government (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs 2000). For example, a non-profit employment service in Sydney formed partnerships with computer companies through which service users gained access to physical (computers), human (technological skills), and social resources (networks linking unemployed people to job opportunities) (Bullen et al 1999).

Social entrepreneurs are not united by a single ideology and span the political spectrum from the neo-liberal (Abbott 2000) to communitarian (Midgley 1996), progressive (Raysmith 1999), and neo-Marxist positions (Church et al 1999). Within the welfare sector, advocates of social enterprise argue that government has a role in supporting social development (Fontan and Shragge 1998; Midgley and Livermore 1998). Nevertheless, social entrepreneurs share concerns about the welfare policies and practices that emerged via the Keynesian welfare state, such as the provision of income support payments and social support services to individuals. They argue that, while these practices may address the short-term needs of service users, they fail to provide pathways out of disadvantage (Midgley 1996). Some believe that the modern

welfare state centres upon passive forms of welfare that disempower individuals and communities (Botsman and Latham 2001; Pearson 2001).

### **The new emphasis on social enterprise: Why now?**

The renewed focus on social enterprise can be attributed, in part, to current transformations in the welfare sector, in particular, changes in the political and organisational context of community service provision (Zappala 2001). The public policy arena in which social enterprise has emerged, and indeed in which social work operates, is in a state of turbulence as many of the certainties of the welfare state are challenged or abandoned. Many governments throughout the English-speaking world have re-positioned themselves as partners in the provision of services, rather than as primary service providers. The notion of partnership is a driving theme in the current Federal government's policy direction towards the establishment of a 'social coalition'. For example, the Federal government, through its *Business and Community Partnerships Program* and its *Welfare Reform* agenda, is promoting greater levels of social investment by business through partnerships with not-for-profit welfare organisations and the development of for-profit initiatives as a strategy for financing and delivering social and community welfare programs. As Considine (2000) notes, this shift 'involves labour market restructure and program change away from collective provision by government and in the direction of contracting-out, privatisation and the empowerment of business and quasi-business actors' (p. 74). The same trend is reflected in the 'Third Way' politics of New Labour in Britain (Giddens 2000). The re-positioning of government has been accompanied by challenges to individual rights to welfare support and significant shifts in responsibilities of voluntary sector agencies. Social enterprise holds out possibilities for the reinvention of welfare practices to enhance their relevance to a re-configured welfare state. In general, the direction of social enterprise initiatives is towards practices which extend the options available to service users for both social and economic participation, based on the notion that government should, at most, facilitate rather than provide such options (Mawson 2001; Pearson 2001).

Secondly, the emergence of social enterprise can be linked to resource constraints in the non-profit community services sector. Growth in government funding to welfare

agencies has not kept pace with escalating demands on these services. Moreover, as a result of new public management reforms, government funding to social service agencies is increasingly tied to service contracts with pre-defined service outputs (Lyons 2001). In this context of financial austerity and control, social enterprise provides community service agencies with alternatives for resourcing new services, especially service innovations that do not fit neatly within government funding guidelines, such as the establishment of co-operative ventures to develop local employment opportunities or social resources like flexible shared child-care

Thirdly, social enterprise resonates with some aspects of progressive critique of established welfare policy and practice. Many social service workers and service users are critical of the limitations of individual welfare provision for empowering individuals and for offering options for sustainable social and economic development (Mawson 2001; Midgley 1996). These commentators argue that social enterprise, particularly community economic development initiatives, can genuinely improve service users' lives by providing opportunities for the recognition and development of their skills and knowledge and for their participation in social and economic development (Midgley 1996; Raheim 1996). Social entrepreneurs emphasise the importance of individuals and communities participating in determining local and relevant solutions to the problems facing them. Many argue for the re-invention of welfare policy and practices so that they are more responsive to the concerns and solutions posed by individuals and communities and more respectful of local knowledge and capacity (Pearson 2001). For many, this focus on local initiative is seen as a vital complement to, rather than as a replacement for, government provision or macro structural change (Botsman & Latham 2001; Pearson 2001).

### **Application to social work**

Social work practice is significantly affected by organisational and policy contexts. Increasingly social workers are confronted with the changing structure of the social and community services sector whereby there is a shifting balance between public and private provision (O'Connor, Warburton & Smyth 2000). The growth of the not-for-profit sector as a major site of service delivery means that social workers will be involved increasingly in non-government organisations either directly in terms of

employment sites, or indirectly, through their role in referral, organisational development and networking. As Rosenman (2000) points out, changes in the structure of delivery systems have implications for the professional training and practice of human service workers, including social workers. In particular, the traditional function of Australian social work to deliver mainly professional, individualised services through the structures of the welfare state (Ife 2000) is likely to be challenged in the new order of human services organisation and labour market structure. On the other hand, the capacity of the more marginalised perspectives and approaches in social work to contribute effectively in this new order should not be underestimated (Ife 1995). Social work's embrace of community development theory and practice provides an important foundation from which to explore the relevance of social enterprise to social work. To again draw on Ife (2000), community development provides hope for the future viability of social work.

Commentators point to similarities between social entrepreneurship and community development (Leitman & Crawford 2001; Healy 2001). However, Healy (2001) highlights an important difference, namely, cross-sectoral collaboration. She says, 'Whereas many community development practitioners have been reluctant to connect with the private business sector, social entrepreneurs view such engagement as critical' (p. 16). This is an important difference and highlights our belief that the changing context of welfare in Australia is forcing social workers to think seriously about building partnerships with private business. Indeed Crofts and Gray (2001) argue that it is precisely because of social work's skills in community development that social workers are ideally placed to make a contribution to evolving social enterprise practice.

More globally, social enterprise is a marginal though long-established activity in social work. Midgley (1996) contends that social workers in developing countries played a decisive role in the development of the practices of social and economic development. A small body of social service researchers in developed countries has also argued for the importance of social enterprise activities, especially micro-economic initiatives and cross-sectoral partnerships, for enhancing the material and social resources available to service users (Gray 1997; Midgley 1996; Raheim 1996). On the face of it, the new emphasis on social enterprise in social policy presents

opportunities for social workers to redirect their practices more firmly towards the profession's historical commitment to addressing social disadvantage (Midgley 1996). Yet, some of the views expressed by the more vocal exponents of social enterprise are also of concern to the ongoing development of progressive and socially just social welfare policies and practices. In particular, we are concerned about the negative and inaccurate generalisations about the welfare state and the offensive caricatures of welfare providers as self-interested and of service users as passive and dependent. Notwithstanding these reservations, we recognise that social enterprise is growing in significance in the community services field and believe that it is important that social workers analyse its potential and limitations for progressive practice.

### **The values underpinning social entrepreneurship**

Table 1 provides a comparison of the values underpinning business, social work and social enterprise.

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of the values underpinning Business, Social Work and Social Enterprise**

<b>CONTEXT</b>	<b>BUSINESS</b>	<b>SOCIAL WORK</b>	<b>SOCIAL ENTERPRISE</b>
<b>Main values</b>	Economic concerns are paramount Efficiency, effectiveness, outcomes, productivity, and profitability predominate Accountability to customers and/or shareholders Recognition of the power of the consumer Donor or charity approach to social contributions (Crofts and Gray, 2001)	Protection of human interests Client rights Service provision Loyalty to employing organisation Accountability Community participation Social inclusion Policy change Social justice	Inseparability of economic and social concerns; balancing economic concerns with social mission or goals Local, community or consumer participation Partnership Promotion of social cohesion and inclusion Diversity, innovation and creativity Opportunism and resourcefulness
<b>Organisational Environment</b>	Bound by varying degrees of bureaucratic procedure and regulation		Operate 'outside the box'
<b>Trends leading to value change</b>	Government policy favours community-business partnership development forcing business into corporate or social responsibility programs, e.g. taking cognisance of social and environmental impacts of their operations	Economic rationalism threatening important humanistic values and forcing agencies in which social workers work to become more competitive and business oriented and develop partnerships with different sectors (government and private)	Changing policy context of changes in government funding to individuals and social organisations and increasingly competitive 'business-like' environment of community service organisations is creating an opening for social enterprise initiatives

While economic concerns are paramount for business and social well-being is not normally seen as a primary motivation, some believe that global capitalism is leading to the death of democracy and the rise in importance of multinational companies that are replacing national governments' function in setting social agendas and providing social services. Hertz (2001) cites numerous examples of ways in which corporations across the world manipulate and pressurise governments and of how consumer protest and product boycotts have become more effective weapons for change than the ballot box. This global trend and the emerging understanding of corporate social responsibility in Australia are contributing to the development of social entrepreneurship (Bartlett 2002). This is not to say that people are happy with what Hertz (2001) calls the *silent takeover*. 'All over the world, concerns are being raised about governments' loyalties and corporations' objectives. Concerns that the pendulum of capitalism may have swung just a bit too far; that our love affair with the free market may have obscured harsh truths; that too many are losing out. That the state cannot be trusted to look after our interests; and that we are paying too high a price for economic growth' (p. 3).

Social work has always placed moral values at its core. The neo-liberal discourse, now a major influence on social policy, poses considerable challenges to the social justice orientations of social work (Gray & Askeland 2002). In the UK, Leveridge (2002) argues that social work practice in Local Authority Social Service Departments has become routinised such that the social worker's role has become that of a technician, and that this impacts on the rights of service-users (see also Adams, Dominelli & Payne 1998). In Australia, several writers have highlighted the effects of economic rationalism on social work, most notably its human costs. Alston and McKinnon (2001) refer to 'an increasingly bureaucratic and oppressive work environment' (p. xx) characterised by increasing managerialism, decreasing job security, low morale, and high levels of stress. Ife (1997, 2001) laments the decline in the government's concern with social justice and human rights, as do Crimeen and Wilson (1997).

A central goal for social enterprise, like social development, is the balancing of economic and social goals. While business and social work are bound by varying



degrees of regulation, social entrepreneurs claim that their diversity, innovation and creativity enable them to operate 'outside the box' of government funding, to seize on opportunities and to respond flexibly to changes in the external environment (Crofts & Gray 2001). As already noted, there are many forms and purposes of social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs are not of one mind when it comes to values and ideology. Given that some members of the non-profit community services sector see social enterprise as 'little more than a re-packaging of community development' (Healy 2001, p. 1), it follows that the values of local, community or consumer participation, the promotion of social cohesion and inclusion, and the pursuit of social justice should enjoy prominence. Social enterprise is thus seen as an attempt to counteract the forces of globalisation, centralisation and denationalisation and to address their impact in local contexts where the opportunity to generate resources through diverse means and funding sources, such as partnerships and for-profit social enterprise initiatives, arises. These means open up possibilities for resource-starved organisations. As previously noted, the imperative to seek alternative financing options is an increasing reality for the non-government sector (Considine 2000; Lyons 2001).

Australian community developers have been reluctant to develop partnerships with the for-profit sector; they have tended to view this sector with suspicion and, in some instances, hostility (Lyons 2001; see also Healy 2001, p. 16). Recent community development initiatives in public housing estates in NSW demonstrate an attempt to combine social and economic objectives. For example, in the Hunter Region of NSW a large not-for-profit community services agency is working with local public housing tenants to establish home maintenance businesses, and in the process enhance the social and employment skills and opportunities of the participants. Social enterprises of this nature require a delicate balance of individual, commercial and collective interests in their efforts to meet sometimes competing objectives.

Our concept of social entrepreneurship thus values local initiative and participation as a measure of principled practice, not only to enhance opportunities to promote social cohesion and collective action, but also in the belief that local participation is a foundation for positive social policy and social change. An inductive approach to social and economic policy rejects the notion that macro policy alone can deliver

solutions to social issues. While analysis of the structural nature of many social and economic problems and, therefore, action at the macro level are both important, the social entrepreneurial approach we favour promotes practice responses and policy frameworks soundly based on an understanding of, and contribution from, local experience. The goals of social cohesion and inclusion should be the drivers of social entrepreneurial activity, for it is the social mission that should be 'explicit and essential' (Dees & Haus 1998, p. 3). Social enterprise initiatives should be able to demonstrate that social as well as economic outcomes have priority. It is important therefore that social goals, values and outcomes are clearly articulated and supported by all institutional stakeholders. In this regard there is a need for significant case study research of community-business partnerships and social entrepreneurial activities, with a particular focus on outcomes for client groups.

The private sector is already an active player in the field of human services in a range of ways as a direct provider, partner and resource base (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs 2000). For example, recent research in the Hunter Region of NSW on the contribution of local business to community causes found that the majority of respondents were making contributions including donations of money (81.6%), goods and services (61.5%), sponsorship (59.7%), and expertise (52.7%). Just on a third of respondents indicated that the business was involved in ongoing partnerships. A higher proportion (nearly 50%) indicated that the business participated in committees, forums or events dealing with community matters, such as civic issues, or social or environmental matters during 2000. The findings relating to causes supported by business suggest that respondents were directing their contributions to community service activities. The data suggests that, at the local and regional level, business contributes significantly but that a great deal of work needs to be done to maximize the strategic allocation of resources (Crofts & Gray 2001).

Finally, social justice outcomes should guide the mission and evaluation of social entrepreneurial activity. Many initiatives in social enterprise seek to address entrenched disadvantage as a product of structural processes and systems that result in long-term negative economic and social consequences for individuals and communities (Pearson 2001). For social workers seeking to use social enterprise strategies critically and reflectively it is important to ask, 'Who benefits?' If outcomes

relate more to organisational growth and resource acquisition than to improved economic and social circumstances for individuals and communities then social entrepreneurship has not lived up to its promise.

### **Questions and concerns about social enterprise**

Thus far we have outlined definitions of and values underpinning social entrepreneurship. While social enterprise can make important contributions to the human services, we are mindful of its limitations. In this concluding section, some questions and concerns are addressed.

#### ***The role of government***

Social entrepreneurs vary in their beliefs about the role of government. Some favour free market approaches where governments should seek to remove bureaucracy and control as much as possible to allow entrepreneurial activity to flourish unencumbered by rules and regulations. For others, the role of government is crucial to establishing and enforcing standards that protect and enhance rights and opportunities and ensure equity of access (Considine 2000).

From a social work perspective, government has a strong role in needs assessment, in resource allocation and in providing adequate social infrastructure at the local and regional levels to facilitate active engagement of social interests in development. It has a responsibility to resource the most needy communities as well as areas where the fallout from economic change has unequal impact. Hence in our opinion, to flourish, social enterprise requires more not less government involvement. It requires open and flexible government, which allows for diversity rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. As Considine (2000) suggests, research and experimentation with 'a wider variety of institutional solutions' (p. 82) are important government responsibilities in this regard, hence the notion of 'the enabling state, the Australian version of the third way' (McDonald & Marston 2001, p. 11). Alongside its protective function to ensure that citizens have adequate access to appropriate levels of income support, government has a role to play in investing in sustainable community initiatives, and in resourcing innovative community enterprises and participatory processes which can have tangible economic and social gains.

The conventional wisdom in Australian social work education and practice has maintained that social services are best provided through the mechanism of the welfare state to meet objectives of human right, equity and fairness (Ife 1997). Not surprisingly, social workers share the deep suspicion of business generally held in the human service industry (Lyons, 2001) and of government promotion of business social investment, seeing it as further evidence of the shift away from collective provision by government in favour of 'business and quasi-business actors' (Considine 2000, p. 76). Insofar as social service provision has a redistributive function, and should be planned and delivered in accordance with notions of equity and need, it is difficult to accept a central role for business in the provision of social support. By focusing on the failure of government to reduce welfare dependency and advocating social entrepreneurship as a better, unfettered solution, it can be argued that social entrepreneurs are undermining 'arguments in favour of mobilising resources of the state' (McDonald & Marston 2001, p. 15) thus offering government a way out of its responsibilities to the most disadvantaged citizens (Healy 2001). By emphasising economic concerns rather than broader socio-structural issues, such as structural inequality and unemployment, this viewpoint conveys the notion that welfare dependency is a passive outcome and that the government's ineffectiveness is somehow to blame for its continued existence.

### ***The role of business***

In advocating a greater role for business in service provision, some commentators talk about business as a homogeneous entity. This stereotype ignores the diversity of the sector, which includes large corporate organisations motivated by big profits as well as businesses of varying sizes in different sectors struggling to survive. Most businesses operate within the dominant donor or charity approach and do not automatically accept the notion that 'doing good' is necessarily beneficial for profits. Hence a great deal of work is needed to build effective community-business partnerships (Crofts and Gray 2001) and the government has a role to play in providing incentives, for example, in allowing for tax transfer system deductions to facilitate the role of business in social enterprise.

### ***The community's role***

Social enterprise emphasises 'the community' as a resource and a site for intervention. Its advocates seek recognition for and development of the social and economic capacities of communities, and attempt to counter public perceptions about the dependency of marginalised communities. Rather than relying solely on experts, professionals and paid carers, they seek involvement of community members in the provision of care, capacity building and economic development activities (Botsman 2001). McDonald and Marston (2001) warn that this brand of communitarianism, which equates civil society with community and in Australia with the community sector, conveys the idea that active participation rather than the exercise of rights and responsibilities is the route to social and economic benefits. Much 'community talk' assumes consensus, harmony and receptiveness to development activities. In reality, communities are hotbeds of complex power relations and conflict, which can lead to the exploitation and harm of people, particularly those who are vulnerable, and the neediest communities have limited resources and diminished capacity to contribute to the kinds of macro level changes required to enhance their economic and social conditions in the longer term. They cannot be expected to cover massive shortfalls in services. Hence the social enterprise view of the *resourceful* community needs to be balanced against real need where only external intervention, be it from government or other sources, can lift the community out of poverty.

### ***The role of the third sector***

Social enterprise cannot flourish without the strong institutional base that community service non-government organisations, an important part of the third sector, provide. Within the human services sector, people in business, the professions, volunteers, and local communities have always worked together in creative ways, providing services and programs, advocating and lobbying for change, acting as a watchdog for clients, and challenging government on unjust policies and practices. Some proponents of social entrepreneurship tend to overlook this contribution, instead offering blanket criticism of welfare dependency. While a positive aspect of social enterprise is the focus on long-term outcomes for individuals, groups and communities, there is a danger that this may leave gaps in availability of short-term relief and create heavy

burdens on a small pool of welfare agencies, particularly in light of service cutbacks and punitive income support policies.

### ***Concern with the analysis of welfare dependency***

Many proponents of social enterprise believe that they can break the cycle of welfare dependency. While strategies to deliver improvements in individual social and economic circumstances are welcomed, the tendency to scapegoat the welfare state for a broad range of social ills and to represent welfare workers and clients as passive and dependent gives cause for concern. The reconstruction of structural disadvantage as individual inadequacy is problematic when economic and social structures cause inequality. This discourse of welfare dependency is very selective and targets the most disadvantaged. It detracts from effective programs that are achieving positive outcomes in spite of structural arrangements that, more than individual limitation perpetuate inequality. As McDonald and Marston (2001) note, 'What is lacking is a critical appreciation of the necessary role that government investment plays in building the social and physical infrastructure that supports the activities of community groups and volunteers to meet social needs' (p. 7).

### ***Concern with the missionary zeal of some proponents of social entrepreneurship***

Some of the most vocal advocates of the social entrepreneurship movement in Australia tend to overgeneralise in their commentaries on the welfare state, ignoring the history and complexity of social policy and service provision (Botsman and Latham 2001). Their missionary zeal runs the danger of isolating important groups who could further their cause, especially those about whom some are critical, such as academics, researchers and social workers. Many of the most vocal advocates are male, yet, it is largely women who staff the services sector and informal caring networks. Sensitivity to gender dynamics is needed if social enterprise is to avoid becoming yet another vehicle through which a small group of dominant male 'visionaries' impose their worldview on the primarily female world of service provision. Furthermore, the missionary zeal of some social entrepreneurs negates work done on the ground to make policy workable. Some of the prescriptions offered are overly simplistic, while communities are contexts of complexity and ambiguity.

Establishing inclusive processes of community engagement based on principles of equality and justice requires careful planning and meaningful dialogue.

### ***Social enterprise: Is it a useful term?***

Finally, it is important to consider whether the terminology of social enterprise is useful for championing the activities to which it refers. On the one hand, the term social enterprise, like social capital, can be seen as strategic device that draws attention to the productivity of the 'social' sphere. It extends concepts traditionally associated with the business sector to allow recognition of the creativity and entrepreneurship of many within the social services sector. It also challenges the artificial separation between government, business and community services sectors, and draws attention to the capacities and responsibilities of each to contribute to community well being. On the other hand, the terminology of social enterprise sits uncomfortably with many in the non-profit sector, particularly those who seek to distance themselves from the world of commerce and profit making. In its explicit reference to terms such as entrepreneurship and venture capital, social enterprise can appear closely aligned with neo-liberal politics and, as such, can seem contradictory to the aim of promoting social change at the local, institutional and structural level. Further, as noted by McDonald and Marston (2001), it legitimises the expanded role of the community sector thus privileging 'community management over government and politics' (p. 9). Also it can be seen as transferring government responsibility for social goods and services to the business or corporate sector (Hertz 2001).

### **Conclusion**

Social enterprise has emerged as an important concept in public and academic debate about the future of welfare both nationally and internationally. Social enterprise is and always has been the business of social work in that it refers to a broad range of activities for integrating economic and social goals in the pursuit of community well being. Given social workers' historical mission to address social disadvantage, the profession has a vital role to play in current debates on social enterprise, in particular, to participate in the much needed examination of its strengths and limitations for achieving social justice with marginalised individuals and communities.

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