

The Melbourne Community Foundation's

Morawetz Social Justice Fund: Information

My father, Paul Morawetz, arrived in Australia with my mother Dita in early 1940 as European refugees from Hitler. I could not begin to tell here the long story of my father's remarkable life. Fortunately, the story has already been told in his biography, *What A Life*, by Gloria Frydman (Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 1995).

At some level, I knew that I might one day inherit a share of the significant financial assets that my father built up after he arrived in Australia. However, my father always seemed pretty immortal to me, so in most ways, I lived my life as if the possibility of my inheriting money did not exist.

Sadly, in April 2001 at the age of 86, my father died. I did indeed inherit a share of his estate, which turned out to be far more money than I had ever expected to have. It was clear to me that I wanted to use most of this money to do something, no matter how small, to reduce social and economic injustice, and inequality of opportunity. I am eternally grateful to my father for providing me with the opportunity to do this. I am grateful to him, too, for the chance to test how deeply held my egalitarian beliefs are. I am happy to find that they are deeply held indeed.

Why a Social Justice Fund?

I have always believed that life is unfair. In particular, I believe that it is unfair that, by pure accident of birth, some people (like myself) have a relatively easy start in life, being born into families that are relatively well-off, whereas others have to struggle all the way, because they are born into very poor families, or families who (for whatever reason) are less able to support and nurture them. This belief was strengthened forty years ago when I spent a summer at age 18 backpacking and travelling on third class trains in India, seeing at first hand extreme poverty and deprivation. "There, but for the grace of God, go I" is a saying that still resonates with me.

Most of my professional career has been spent trying to contribute to making the world a fairer place, so that those who are less well-off have a better chance of a decent and fulfilling life than they would otherwise have.

I first trained as an economist, specialising in the economics of developing countries. Over two decades, I worked as an economic consultant in Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, in countries including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Peru, and Sri Lanka. I also taught economics to post-graduate students from Africa, Asia and Latin America at Boston University, students who would apply and implement what they had learned when they returned home. My aim was always to try to make a difference, so that at least some people in some developing countries around the world might be a bit better off.

At the age of 35, for a thousand reasons, I decided to change fields, and began studying counselling and psychology. In 1988, aged 43, I realised a dream by setting up in full-time private practice as a clinical and counselling psychologist. My aim in private practice over the past 16 years has been again to help those in difficulties, with the emphasis this time being on emotional difficulties rather than economic ones.

I have always been conscious in private practice of setting aside some spaces for people who have less ability to pay. And I have put out a self-help program “Sleep Better Without Drugs”, in an attempt to help more people than the relatively few I can see personally, and in particular to help people outside the capital cities who might not normally have access to counselling services. To date, more than 15,000 copies of this program have been sold in 33 countries, which has been very gratifying.

In recent years, I have been inspired by the Dalai Lama. One of the things the Dalai Lama said on a visit to Australia was: “If you want to be happy, help people, because you are the one who gets the help – if they get some help as well, that’s a bonus.” I believe strongly in this principle. Certainly, it is deeply fulfilling for me to be able to contribute to the promotion of social and economic justice.

Current Funding Priorities

The criteria for grants or distributions to projects from the Morawetz Social Justice Fund are flexible, and will no doubt change over the years. At present they are as follows.

1. The grants should “make a difference” to the people who receive them. In general, there should be no alternative source of funding available for the project under consideration.
2. Grants should follow the principle: “Give a person a fish, and you feed him or her for a meal; teach people how to fish, and you feed them for life.”
3. Grants may not be used to benefit only one religious group. That is, grants may not be earmarked only for Christians, or Muslims, or Jews, etc. This does not mean that grants cannot go to organisations like the Brotherhood of St Laurence, or the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service – these groups definitely remain eligible, because their good works are open to all, regardless of religion.
4. Raising society’s consciousness regarding inequality and unfairness, and funding research into poverty and ways of alleviating it, are additional important eligible uses for grants. So, too, are funding scholarships to support people for whom study offers a way out of the poverty trap.
5. A significant proportion of grants should go to help people in developing countries, and in particular, to help some of the poorest people in the world. In the context of grants to projects in developing countries, the Fund’s top two priorities at present are the provision of clean water, and the provision of education for women and girls.

Access to clean water is needed to eliminate the diseases, some of them potentially fatal, that are carried in polluted water, and to free up the long hours that many villagers in developing countries have to spend each day walking to fetch water.

Women's and girls' education is singled out partly because girls are discriminated against in access to education in some countries. In addition, once girls and women are educated, they are more likely to have fewer children, which means that they can devote more resources and attention to each child, so each child is likely to have a better start in life. At a society-wide level, for these and other reasons, economic and social development (as measured by per capita income, life expectancy, and so forth) are closely correlated with the level of female education.

6. Some grants from the Fund should be made within Australia. In this regard, one of the Fund's priorities at present is to help disadvantaged youth.

Initial Grant in Developing Countries (Ethiopia)

The first grant to a project in a developing country has been, through Oxfam–Community Aid Abroad, to enable the digging of a well in Tigray. Tigray is one of the poorest regions in Ethiopia, which is itself one of the least developed countries in the world (it ranks 168th out of 173 countries). In Ethiopia, partly because of lack of access to clean water, one child in five dies before the age of five.

This project has enabled some 500 people living in the remote Tigray village of Hawile-Gazine to have access to clean water for the first time. Alternative sources of water for this village and other villages in the region are extremely scarce and inaccessible. They include inadequate seasonal wells, soak holes shared with animals, roadside puddles, and shallow pools in creek beds. These are subject to pollution, and they dry up in the long rainless months, causing women and children (especially girls) to have to walk up to eight hours a day to find and fetch water. Water-born diseases causing severe diarrhoea are common, and infant mortality is high.

Local village women have been involved closely in the planning and execution of the digging of the well, thereby increasing their sense of self-efficacy and empowerment, and increasing their status and leadership opportunities. And the girls and boys and women who had to spend many hours fetching water will now be able to go to school and/or devote themselves to more productive activities in agriculture, animal husbandry, spinning cotton for sale at market, and so forth.

Initial Grant in Australia (St Albans)

One of the first grants within Australia has been to a social justice project in St Albans (a Melbourne suburb that has one of the lowest per capita incomes in Australia). The project was conducted by a doctoral student at Victoria University.

Under this project, titled Social Action with Youth (SAY), teenagers in St Albans have been encouraged to express their passions and interests in life, and to use these passions to engage in positive activities to improve their local community. In particular, the researcher facilitated young people getting together in small groups to identify local needs. They then worked out how to meet these needs, developed ways of doing so, and then documented and disseminated the results, for example by writing an article for the local newspaper. There are also plans to produce a Handbook for Social Change that might be used by other youth groups.

Through this project, young people who might otherwise feel marginalised and hopeless have been encouraged to develop a sense of self-efficacy and empowerment, a feeling that they can indeed do something to change aspects of their own lives.

One of these small SAY groups decided there was a need for an underage dance party at which no alcohol or drugs were present, so they organised one. Some 300 teenagers attended, most aged 15-16. The dance was so successful that it may now become a regular event, and one of the organising students was offered a paid job as a DJ.

Conclusion

I would like to reiterate my deep gratitude to my father for leaving the inheritance which has enabled me to set up the Morawetz Social Justice Fund. I feel privileged to have been able to do so. I am extremely grateful, too, to the Melbourne Community Foundation, under whose auspices the Fund has been established. MCF's (then) Executive Officer, Helen Imber, was most helpful – with her cheerful assistance, the process of setting up the Fund was much easier than I had expected. A stand-alone foundation (which was the alternative to setting up a Fund under MCF) would have been far more difficult to set up and maintain.

It is my hope that the Morawetz Social Justice Fund will be passed on down the generations, to play a small role in promoting social and economic justice, reducing inequality of opportunity, and making the world a fairer place. I am delighted that my three children, Deb, Ben and Simon, have already shown an interest in it. I hope that they will take it over when I am gone, and then pass it on to their children, and their children's children...

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Brief Summary Statement

Morawetz Social Justice Fund

This fund was set up to contribute to promoting social and economic justice in Australia and in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.