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## NFPS: THE BACKBONE OF A SUCCESSFUL ECONOMY



Above: Futurist, business expert and media personality, Dr Keith Suter, behind the lecturn at the 2012 ACS State Conference.

By Yasmin Noone

It is in the best interests of Australia's business community to listen to and support not-for-profit (NFP) organisations because without the church and charitable sector, the social foundations upon which the economy is built will crumble and the wheels of business will not turn.

This message about the economic importance of the NFP sector was delivered by the foreign and international affairs editor for Channel 7's Sunrise, Dr Keith Suter, to a room full of aged care advocates, at the Aged and Community Services (ACS) NSW & ACT State Conference late last week.

The economic futurist, Dr Suter, urged the NFP audience to jump on board its own band wagon, and convince itself and the business community of its monetary worth.

"No successful business person is ever entirely self-made," said Dr Suter. "It takes at least a village to raise a business.

"Rich people only get rich because they live in a flourishing economy...[NFPs] provide the social foundations for a flourishing economy.

“Social capital makes for a good business environment and economic growth. [A strong not-for-profit sector] explains why Australia is doing well and Somalia, say, is not.”

So analysts can say that part of Australia's "economic success is because of what we provide in the social sector".

NFPs, he said, must therefore speak to businesses in their own language, expressing their worth using the terms that 'business people' understand – money.

“We need to convince the external business community why it is in their interests to help our interest which is assisting older people.

“The bottom line is ‘you get rich because of us’.”

Furthering his argument, the former consultant on social policy at Wesley Mission, explained that were it not for church and charitable groups, social infrastructure and services and the ‘behind the scenes’ work they do, many profitable businesses would not prosper.

“We give workers a sense of relief that their folks are being cared for so that they can focus more on work.

“We are contributing to people to [enable them to] go out and earn money. NFPs help for-profits make their money.”

He said the work conducted by the volunteers, especially older people, is irreplaceable and worth millions of dollars in goods and services (GDP).

“The problem we have is the way we measure GDP – money [passing] through the economy.

“Older people are the largest providers of childcare. Yet we do not recognise the contribution they make to society as there are no cash transactions [made for their volunteer work].

“Should we charge for their services, then economists would take them seriously.

“...NFPs can [also] mobilise people in a way the for-profits can not...And businesses are amazed by how charities mobilise people and volunteers on the basis of passion, not money.”

Dr Suter advised church and charitable aged and community care providers to focus on their economic worth, go on the offensive, and tell people and businesses about how much valuable work they do.

“The message to business community should be, ‘support the aged care industry’s lobbying as it is in your best interests. It’s in your interests that the aged care sector flourishes’.”