

advantaged young people with concerned companies—to hire another 40 in the next few weeks.

On a smaller scale, the Body Shop beauty stores have teamed with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence in Victoria to create traineeships for 14 disadvantaged young people. Since 1991, Esprit De Corp Australia, a clothing company with 48 stores and 210 permanent staff, has employed 12 disadvantaged young people, on the way to a target of one in each store set by the late John Bell, Esprit's managing director. Bell said: "If we as a business . . . could encourage the 857,000 Australian businesses to try to employ just one unemployed young person on a compassionate basis, the youth unemployment problem could be solved tomorrow." Bell's views are echoed by Body Shop director Graeme Wise: "If business thinks they're not part of fixing up the problem, then God help us . . . If you just take your sustenance from society and are not prepared to put anything back, you're a pure parasite."

DR. SIMON LONGSTAFF, of the St. James Ethics Centre in Sydney, says good ethics is good business, as it brings both consumer and employee loyalty. But he cautions that good works embarked on solely for their PR value will backfire: "The public is wise to that. Companies that do that will be found out and it will leave a very bad taste in everybody's mouth." Social worker Professor Jan Carter, a director of Employment in the Community for Young People, distinguishes responsibility from promotion: "Corporate community involvement is not sponsorship. It's actually face-to-face involvement. It's about spending time and not just writing checks." Hugh Davies, director of personnel and corporate affairs at Mayne Nickless, says: "Employees will be attracted to companies that have good values." Part of the appeal, says Davies, is the opportunity for busy staff to fit community work into office hours. Among Mayne Nickless' activities is a "mentor program," which involves head-office employees meeting young unemployed people. Says Davies:

"Without exception, the staff have come back and said the opportunity to be involved this way has enriched their lives."

The helping hand extends beyond jobs. The Esprit Cares Trust Fund, for example, has an Accommodation Sponsorship Program for young homeless people who want to stay at school. It subsidizes the rent on three two-bedroom flats in Melbourne's southern suburbs; the secondary school students housed in them pay only 20% of their Austudy income. Each of the 53 Body

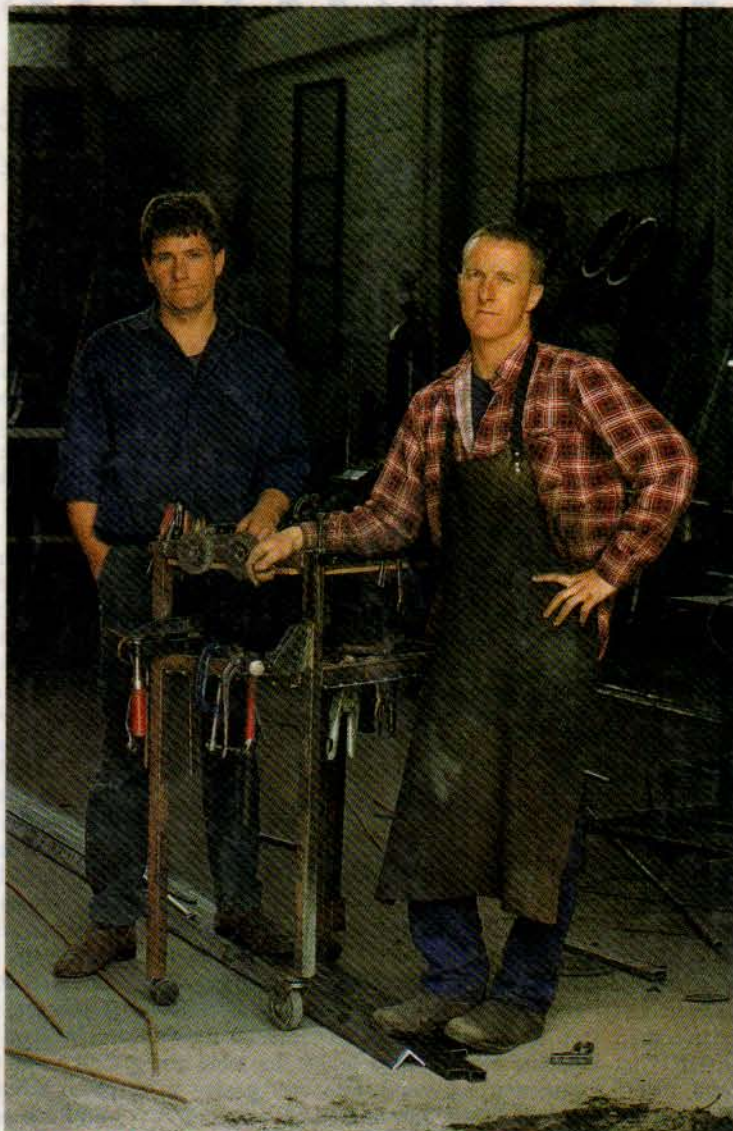
with them and apply it to their daily work, then we could change everything that's wrong with the social fabric of our country."

Company size often bears little relation to magnitude of heart. In Perth, Peter Coughlan, who makes steel furniture, is about to hire his third worker—the second of his employees to come direct from the criminal justice system. Coughlan has listed his business, Fear and Loathing, on the Second Chance Business Register, run by

the community organization Outcare. Second Chance and Outcare link released prisoners—who are urged to reveal their record when applying for jobs—with employers who agree to assess applicants on merit only. Coughlan hired Glen Larsen six months ago, less than a fortnight after Larsen was released from 3½ years in prison for armed robbery with violence. Coughlan says any employee can be a security risk: "At least with these people you know what they've done . . . it makes me feel like I've done something positive, instead of just talking about it." Larsen, 27, now has a key to the factory. "I love it, it's the only job I've ever stuck to," he says. "He put me on. I just do the right thing back and work hard."

Although the signs are promising, business philanthropy remains a trickle not a flood. Says business ethics adviser Longstaff: "I fear it's only at a skin-deep level in Australia." Australian Council for Social Service director Robert Fitzgerald sees potential for the welfare and business sectors to work together. Says Fitzgerald: "If we can in fact bring about a cultural change in the corporate world, then all things are possible."

For Jacqui Parkes, the idea of what is possible has widened. As she sees it, after the Breaking the Cycle course "there were two doors: one back to the Frankston life and one to a new life. I thought, 'I'll try the new one.'" When the work experience with Mayne Nickless finishes she plans to move to Perth to live with her mother, find a job—any job—to "prove to her I've really changed," and study interior design. "I'm so busy now, I don't have time to dwell on the past," says Parkes. "My future lies ahead of me, and it's so big." ■



KEY TO THE FACTORY: Peter Coughlan and Glen Larsen

Shop stores in Australia and New Zealand, plus the warehouse and head office, chooses and operates its own community project, for which staff are given paid time off. Ideas range from giving foot massages to palliative care patients in Newcastle to fundraising for Queensland's Abused Child Trust. Says Body Shop's Wise: "If you could mobilize all the people who go to work each day not to leave their humanity on the hatstand as they walk in, but to take it in