SBS ‘Struggle Street’ Season 1: Episode 1 (Source: ATOM Study Guide K. Marriner 2015)

[Struggle Street S01E01 - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcd2JCFQl48)

INTRODUCTION

Some Australian families and individuals are facing the daily hardships of economic and social disadvantage. They are struggling just to get by. *Struggle Street* (2015) is a three-part observational documentary series made by KEO Films Australia for SBS.

*Struggle Street* was filmed in and around the Mount Druitt area1 and documents the challenges of life for some individuals and families living on the fringes of Sydney’s metropolitan area. Approximately one in three residents in some parts of the Mt Druitt area are public housing tenants and many live with a disproportionate rate of complex social problems2. Generational disadvantage means there are few role models for young people who want to break the cycle.

*Struggle Street* goes beyond the tabloid headlines and introduces us to the people often wrongly labelled as ‘dole bludgers’, ‘housos’, ‘druggos’ and ‘welfare cheats’. The series explores the circumstances and events that have led them to the difficult situations they face today.

The participants of *Struggle Street* gave KEO Films exclusive and uncensored access to their lives over a six-month period. The result is a raw and honest account of life in an under-resourced Australian suburban area. The stories are at times confronting, but also inspiring, as we witness resilience and dignity in the face of overwhelming personal and social problems.

**EPISODE ONE**

Episode One tells three very differ­ent stories of individuals and families battling to survive. Ashley and Peta have ten children and eighteen grand­children. With not enough money to go around, and a multitude of health problems, surviving every day is a chal­lenge. Life is made all the more difficult when illicit drugs threaten to tear their family apart. Indigenous man William is living rough in the bush. Relying on his slingshot to kill birds for food, he is caught between two cultures, and struggling to retain his identity. Even though single mum Erin is unemployed and battling to bring up her four-year-old son, she has decided to take in homeless sixteen-year-old Bailee.

**PARTICIPANTS**

1. **THE KENNEDYS**

Peta and husband Ashley have ten kids and eighteen grandkids between them. Both were employed, Peta in the cater­ing industry and Ashley as an interstate truck driver for thirty years, until severe family illness forced them out of work and onto benefits.

Ashley is only fifty-two-years old but he is in the early stages of dementia. Adding to his health woes is heart trouble. Peta is Ashley’s full-time carer, and is responsible for managing and mediating the family’s many issues. Her other passion is the local community, and she devotes her time to fund-rais­ing for others despite the often over­whelming crises on the home front.

The Kennedys’ lives are regularly thrown into chaos by twenty-five-year-old Corey’s ice addiction. The family has tried everything but Corey is relent­less, even stealing family possessions to buy ice. Ashley is continually disap­pointed and upset by his son’s behav­iour. When Corey seemingly disobeys a court order, his girlfriend Shantelle takes their one-year-old son Liam and leaves.

Chloe, the Kennedys’ eighteen-year-old daughter, suffers epilepsy and autism and has been bullied to the point where she tried to take her own life. Ashley and Peta are concerned about Chloe’s future. They are doing all they can to increase her self-confidence.

Tristan is Corey’s younger brother. When he was sixteen, he suffered a brain injury in a motorbike accident that killed his friend. He is now living independently with the help of a carer. Tristan is a regular speaker at schools and road safety forums. His accident has prompted him to make better deci­sions about his life.

Fourteen-year-old Zac is the young­est of Ashley and Peta’s children. He attends secondary school, where he is doing well, and he is a promising young Rugby League player. Despite the chaos that pervades his home life on a daily basis, Zac’s misbehaviour is typical of any adolescent boy – staying up too late playing video games and annoying his sister.

1. **BOB AND BILLIE-JO**

Bob is forty-seven-years-old. His life has been all but destroyed by his heroin and ice habits. Bob’s collection of family photographs reveals his other life. Bob’s wife Caron suffered a brain aneurysm eight years ago. She now lives in a nursing home. Bob lives in public housing. His ongoing tenancy is a matter before a tribunal but Bob is reluctant to attend.

Billie-Jo is twenty-one-years-old and pregnant for the third time. Her two children have been taken away from her. Carlene, Billie-Jo’s mother, is not surprised by her daughter’s drug use during her pregnancy. According to Carlene, Billie-Jo was born an addict because of Carlene’s methadone habit. When Billie-Jo goes into labour six weeks early, she does not tell Bob until the birth is over. Bob may not even be the father.

1. **WILLIAM**

Having been kicked out of his sister’s house, thirty-eight-year-old William is living rough in the bush, using home­made slingshots to hunt birds to eat. He currently does not have formal ID docu­ments. As an Indigenous Australian, William feels as if he is caught between two cultures. He is struggling to find his place in society.

1. **ERIN AND BAILEE**

Erin is a twenty-one-year-old single mum with a four-year-old son. A survivor of domestic abuse and teenage homeless­ness, Erin is caring for sixteen-year-old Bailee. Bailee needs somewhere to live after the house she was living in was trashed. Despite the adversity of their circumstances, both Erin and Bailee are determined to keep their lives on track.

1. **CHRIS, CHERYL AND MICHELLE**

Chris grew up in foster care. He has inherited many of the mental illnesses his mother, Cheryl, suffers from. Chris doesn’t want a disability support pen­sion; he wants a job. He also wants to maintain a relationship with his mother. He has forgiven her for not being able to show him love when he was younger. Chris lives with his mother’s twin sister, Michelle. Michelle and Cheryl do not get on but Chris is hopeful that the sisters can become closer.

Cheryl and Michelle are almost forty-five. Their childhood was marked by abuse and their adult lives have been compromised as a consequence. Cheryl’s mental illness has led to her four children being taken from her. Michelle became a teenage alcoholic. She now regards herself as a survivor.

**Complete the following table:**

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| PLACE | PEOPLE | ISSUES | AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGE |
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Write your reflections on episode 1

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**DISCUSSION: SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE**

People who are socially disadvan­taged are those who are on low incomes who struggle to supply themselves and their family with food, clothing and shelter. Most would be on social security benefits. This group of people can include single-parent families, the sick, disabled and invalid people, elderly people, the unem­ployed, the homeless and those peo­ple who have been recently released from jail or those who are substance dependent or recovering from being substance dependent.

**How has your attitude to social disadvantage changed since watching *Struggle Street*?**

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**What do the underlined terms refer to?**

• Ashley: One day you wake up and you’re short. You’ve got no milk or bread or something. You’ve got a few bucks for fuel in the car. Throw five bucks in. Go for a drive around the neighbourhood, have a look through the scrap piles. Pick up a bit of scrap here or there, bit of old metal. Take it to the scrap yard. You probably make fifty or a hundred bucks. Gets you through for a day or so. That’s what you do when you’re short. Nothing else you can do.

• **What is generational disadvantage?**

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Australia is a country that calls itself ‘lucky’ and prides itself on the fact that it gives people a ‘fair go’. Yet social disadvantage exists in Australia. The social disadvantage portrayed in *Struggle Street* is not unique. The issues facing the people featured in the series are present in many com­munities across Australia, especially those in rural and remote areas. Statistics suggest that over the last decade lower income groups have not benefited from the strong Australian economy to the same extent as middle and higher income households.

Indicators of social disadvantage that are documented in *Struggle Street* include: income, employment, hous­ing, education, family composition and health. Many aspects of disadvantage go hand in hand. For example, there is an association between poor educa­tion and low income, as well as low income and inferior housing.