



Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
Jobactive
Work for the Dole
September 2018

Northern Community Church of Christ

ABN 85 020 209 355

and

Northern Community CareWorks Ltd

ABN 25 626 129 084





A Snapshot of Northern Community as Host

2003 Northern Community commenced its connection with Work for the Dole.

16,000 Community meals created in 2017

3,110 Participants Hosted by Northern between 2013-2017

4.6 out of 5 'Very Positive'

When participants were asked to rate their experience at Northern on a scale of 1-5 (5 being very positive) over 70 participants rated their experience 4.7

18 Participants have successfully applied to work as staff at Northern

130 Work experience places currently offered onsite

6 Activities

Hospitality

Retail (including Retail Express POS)

Sewing (Textile design, manufacturing and repurposing)

Administration including cash office, reception, Microsoft Office

Cleaning (including use of carpet steam cleaning)

Gardening (kitchen/community garden, planter box to plate, Group Project – therapeutic community garden)

\$1.38/hr

In funding for the provision of quality supervision

2003

Four separate Churches of Christ churches, sold their individual properties four years earlier and established a new church in Preston, located at the inner north of Melbourne. Northern Community Church of Christ commenced its association with Work for the Dole in 2003. Passionate about making a positive difference in the lives of individuals and the local community, Northern's then minister, Phil McCredden was invited to take on the churches first Work for the Dole participant to assist them to gain valuable work experience skills.

An already established hospitality/meals programme established by one of the amalgamating churches was reinvented at Northern, serving its first meals around 2003/2004. Some of the founding community lunch attendees, like Dot, still attend the meals today.

At Northern, our point of difference comes through Work for the Dole participants interacting with people like Dot who love coming to Northern. Those gaining work experience in the hospitality activity will often hear Dot proclaim, "Coming here has kept me out of a nursing home." Participants see the real difference their efforts make in people's lives. Each day, the community applaud the participant's service. Participants watch community members in their 90's bust out a move with the community band in full swing.



16,000

two course community meals (running Monday to Thursday) were created by participants in 2017. Participants also package donated fresh bread so that community members can help their dollar stretch further. They get to appreciate the value of community and realise that while they might find life tough at times, they are not alone in the importance of making limited resources stretch as far as they can. Our participants also have the opportunity to observe our supervisors helping people coming in with crisis and acute needs through their efforts of preparing nutritious meals, through retail (op-shop) and people in desperate need of clothing or household items. It is one thing for people to gain public housing, but when they have no furniture, our Work for the Dole participants efforts can help those in need directly or through partner organisations assisting them to gain dignity through donated goods.

3,110

Work for the Dole participants have gained meaningful work experience at Northern between 2013-2017 with many more over the preceding ten years. This depth of experience has enabled Northern to be a leader in Hosting participants while also providing support for other Hosts and Job Providers, such as the OHS training opportunity for Job Prospects staff in 2018 (pictured). Northern provides each participant with a two-stage induction (including OHS) at a Host level and an Activity level. This induction ensures participants are afforded quality support and supervision. Northern has offered approximately 400 Work for the Dole places each year, with an average of 1.5 people filling each place over a year.



Subsequent to fulfilling their mutual obligations, over 70 participants during 2013-2017 have continued as volunteers at Northern.

4.6 out of 5 'Very Positive'

In a survey from June 2018, approximately three hundred and fifty participants were asked: 'On a scale of 1 - 5 (1 - not positive & 5 - very positive), how would you rate your work experience at Northern CareWorks?' Seventy-five participants responded with an average score of 4.6 out of 5.

On numerous occasions, Northern's supervisors have met participants commencing their mutual obligation who show signs of mental health degradation. Participants regularly present themselves as withdrawn, having low self-worth, anxious and distressed. This observation is consistent with the findings cited by Philip and Mallan (2015).

'According to the latent deprivation model, programs such as [Work for the Dole] could help alleviate mental health issues by providing some of the psychological benefits of employment such as structuring an unemployed individual's time, and increasing social contact and daily activity (T. Philip & Mallan 2015, p. 9).' This is certainly the overwhelming experience at Northern.

Participants are actively encouraged to provide feedback on how Northern's structures and supervisors can assist them to achieve the best outcome in their placement with us as the Host. Participants who are LGBTI or have physical/mental health, cultural issues are supported and cared for. This ensures their experience with Northern and their gaining of skills has the best potential for success.

A small sample of the feedback Northern receives from participants are included below:

Mark S "A very good experience."
Magdalena B "Very, very positive, I love it working in the kitchen, and my supervisor is a fantastic person."
Debbie H "It is a fantastic place to work in. The people who work there are very friendly, and they care about you."
Jenny E "Thanks so much for the opportunity and for your AMAZING community work."
Angela P "The people who work there are very good."

Lawrence T "As part of my mutual obligation I was required to have a six-month placement. **Two and a half years later I am still at CareWorks on a volunteer basis regardless of any other mutual obligations I am required to fulfil- I think that speaks for itself.** The staff create a stress-free environment. People who are not used to presenting for work are able to come to work even with an initial reluctance and can quickly develop a self-imposed discipline that can be carried over to paid employment. My placement has been useful. It has given me experience in the retail area but most specifically in the area of customer relations. I have never dealt with people on such a basis and it has helped me develop a certain type of patience within that interaction. There are many ways of handling staff which creates a work environment- I will certainly aim to work in a placement that has a similar experience to Northern."

Mr ELASMAR MP Victoria (ALP) — 'On Wednesday, 13 June (2018), I was invited to tour the Northern Community Church of Christ centre located within my electorate in High Street, Preston. David Toscan(o), the CEO of the centre, outlined his work-for-the-dole programs which he is currently overseeing with his CareWorks manager, Tamsin Magnay. **The programs include hospitality, retail and information technology to name just a few. I congratulate them both for their drive and passion and for really helping people in a very practical and useful way. This training and job placement is vital to upskilling people for future long-term employment.'** (Hansard)

Lidia Thorpe, State MLA for Northcote, Victoria (Greens) 'I'm a big fan of op shopping, so when I went to visit Northern Community Church of Christ for a community lunch last week I was blown away at, not only their fantastic op shop, but all the opportunities they offer job seekers. **They offer training in retail, admin, cleaning, sewing hospitality, technology, carpentry & gardening! Many even go on to find work afterwards or start their own business, which is pretty fantastic.** If you're interested in supporting this great social enterprise visit their website below.' (Facebook Post)

18 Participants have successfully applied to work as staff at Northern. Such is the positive experience that Northern provides participants, participants regularly ask if they could work for us on an ongoing basis. When positions do become available, there are multiple applicants with the majority coming from people who have had work experience at Northern.

6 Activities

have been available for the placement of participants. These activities include work experience opportunities in the growth areas identified by the Department of Jobs and Small Business. Hospitality, Cleaning, Administration within **Health and Social Assistance**; Retail, Administration and Sewing within the **Retail Industry**; and Gardening and Landscape Design, Administration within the **Construction Industry** (*The next generation of employment services discussion paper*. 2018, p. 13).

In each of these activities, Northern pursues the goal of best practice and to be a leader in the Host environment. Programmes offered by Northern assist people gain skills in health and social assistance through our community lunches which attract people from a less secure socioeconomic basis including disability groups and members of the public with a broad cultural representation. Our Op-Shop provides skill development in the retail industry from customer service, loss control, marketing and sales, POS training and experience, shop display and delivery preparation.



Our Garden and Landscape Design (pictured) gives participants opportunities to develop skills in design, production and construction of projects from park benches, to outdoor school student workstations, bespoke furniture items, design and implementation of community therapeutic and kitchen gardens and general introductory trade skills.

Challenges

\$1.38/hr

In funding for the provision of quality supervision. The financial contribution for Hosts has not increased for several years despite programme delivery costs continuing to increase which has placed a significant strain on Northern's resources (Kellard, Honey & McNamara 2015, p. 49). Our legal advice confirms the Fair Work Ombudsman's recommendation that staff supervising Work for the Dole participants should be on the *Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010*. Over recent years, this award has on average increased at approximately twice that of inflation and may potentially continue to do so until 2020.

Increases in the cost of providing administrative support coupled with increases to administrative responsibilities for Hosts have increased the financial pressure on the provision of activities.

Northern has been advised by Job Providers that there are no provisions for Personal Protective Equipment. This results in expectations from providers that participants will either share PPE, provide their own or Northern is required to budget for a further increase in programme delivery costs.

As a result of changes to the funding model for Work for the Dole, Northern has made the difficult decision to make redundant five staff over July-September 2018. In broad terms, the Federal Government funding of Northern as a Host of Work for the Dole has dropped by approximately \$230,000 from 2016 to 2017. Reserves from the church's funds subsidised wages and activity running costs for 2017-2018.

Proposed changes from 30 to 50 hrs/fortnight in mutual obligation requirements will have a further significant impact on Hosts (*Stronger Participation Requirements – new rules around job seeker participation*, p. 1). An activity which may be close to breakeven at 30hrs per fortnight may no longer be financially viable due to wages increase of approximately \$7,800 over six months with no additional contributions to cover these or other associated activity running costs.

By simply mandating Jobactive providers to pass the full \$1000 to Hosts when placing a job seeker would provide a significant level of financial assistance to Hosts without any additional costs to the Department. Hosts are 'price takers' in this system and have very little bargaining power to negotiate a higher contribution from providers.

Dissemination of information

As a Host, Northern works with a variety of Job Providers, yet there is often inconsistent or conflicting information provided to Northern on changes to Work for the Dole. This inconsistency creates significant uncertainty in planning with confidence. A lack of open communication between all stakeholders introduces unnecessary challenges and undermines the pursuit of successful outcomes (Kellard, Honey & McNamara 2015).

By providing a reference point for Hosts to contact the Department would enable transparent information from those who make policy.

Lack of quality feedback systems

Northern understands that Work for the Dole is not designed to fund the Host running of work experience activities exclusively, however the lack of qualitative and quantitative data significantly restricts the ability to secure additional forms of funding. Northern has asked Job Providers for information relating to how many participants have gone on to find employment. Unfortunately, the Job Providers have not been able to provide this information. Northern is then left to try, with limited access to information, to gather anecdotal evidence in funding applications.

By providing a reference point For Hosts to the Department would enable Hosts to provide timely feedback on the issues surrounding the implementation of new initiatives or changes. This would assist in reducing stress for Jobactive Providers, Hosts and Job Seekers.

Delays in participant placement in Work for the Dole

The increase from 6 months to 12 months before placing people into Work for the Dole initiatives allows for greater entrenchment in lifestyle habits which are often not conducive to normal work habits. Changes to these habits take time and effort on behalf of Hosts.

By reducing the timeframe from 12 months to 6 months before a Job Seeker is placed with a Host would assist those who are still seeking work to reconnect with employers and maintain a level of beneficial rhythm associated with work.

Increases in administrative requirements

Previous iterations of Work for the Dole required less day to day administrative oversight (Kellard, Honey & McNamara 2015). However, with the introduction of increased levels of reporting and a lack of participant awareness of changes, dedicated administrative support is necessary with its associated costs raising questions of the programme's ongoing viability.

Work experience is beneficial for all

Research supports the assessment that quality work experience is beneficial for job seekers (*The next generation of employment services discussion paper*. 2018; Kellard, Honey & McNamara 2015; T. Philip & Mallan 2015). However, the suggested increased weighting of work experience through employers raises concerns regarding the employer's ability to respond to complex needs identified by T. Philip and Mallan (2015) and Kellard, Honey and McNamara (2015) and the increased casualisation of the workforce.

Supervision from appropriately skilled supervisors is critical but can be lacking due to the complex skill mix required from supervisors. This suggests further support, guidance and information is required to help host organisations provide suitable supervision to job seekers. (Kellard, Honey & McNamara 2015, p. 52)

At Northern, our supervisors have combined total of 34 years of experience as Work for the Dole supervisors with one supervisor having ten years. This depth of experience provides the critical awareness of some of the complex needs of Work for the Dole participants and how best to provide meaningful placements with Northern as the Host.



Northern's Community Garden

References

Kellard, K, Honey, N & McNamara, T 2015, *Evaluation of Work for the Dole 2014-15*, The Social Research Centre, North Melbourne.

The next generation of employment services discussion paper., 2018, <<https://docs.jobs.gov.au/documents/next-generation-employment-services-discussion-paper>>.

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T. Philip & Mallan, K 2015, *A NEW START?: IMPLICATIONS OF WORK FOR THE DOLE ON MENTAL HEALTH OF UNEMPLOYED YOUNG AUSTRALIANS*, Children and Youth Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology.



Gull Awan, Sewing / Textile Activity Supervisor