

Background

I am a 53-year-old woman. I have been on Jobseeker for the past three years due to a divorce. I have a Bachelor Degree in Social Sciences. I was a qualified Trainer and Assessor (qualifications expired). I have a Certificate IV in Youth Work. I am currently studying for a Certificate IV in Community Services.

I have worked for a major Finance Company as a Relationship Manager which meant I was responsible for the receipt and correct processing of millions of dollars on a daily basis. I have been a Team Manager. I worked for two prominent Unions. I have drafted Enterprise Agreements and Company Contracts. I have written policies, procedures and documented Work-Flows. I have identified, documented and implemented Process Improvements.

Due to changes in life style, I have also worked in a Butchers Shop, as an artificial Flower arranger, in a bakery and as a cleaner. I am adaptable.

I have been living with Rheumatoid Arthritis since I was 35, it is a Chronic and Progressive condition. Sometimes my body works and other times it doesn't. It is not predictable. Some days I can walk, others I cannot. Some days I can drive, others it is unsafe. Some days my hands work, others they do not. This makes me unreliable for an employer – and rightly so.

I am not eligible for the Disability Pension. Centrelink have determined that I am able to work 15-20 hours per week. This means I have to have a Job Provider.

Positive Job Provider Experiences

The most positive experience I have had was with a worker for Job Provider A who listened to me. She was understanding of my physical limitations, listened, was not condescending and helped me get into the NEIS Scheme. Unfortunately I have been unable to raise the funds to get my idea off the ground but her assistance with this helped with my confidence and her acknowledgement of my skill base gave me hope. Unfortunately, this Provider was bought out by a larger company and I had to move to a new one.

Negative Job Provider Experiences

This is unfortunately a more extensive list.

Job Provider B matched me with a very young woman. Her approach was both uniformed and condescending, perhaps due to a lack of training.

I was required to attend weekly appointments for 45 minutes that included her sharing inappropriate personal stories and reading me ads on SEEK. I had assumed she would be more professional and proactive in assisting me to find employment.

Memorable comments included:

- “FTE. I don’t know what that means – do you?”
- “Do you know you can filter SEEK to just see the past 7 days”
- “Oh, this one requires Minute-Taking. What is that? I’ve never heard of that before.”
- “Go on Youtube. You can learn anything on there” This was a response to me asking what re-training would be available to me.
- “I know it says Full-time but you have to apply anyway as you meet the skill set”.

The above comments suggested to me that the above person had not read my resume or that there was no recognition that I am only able to work 15-20 hours per week.

I found this process both frustrating and intimidating. There seems to be a lack of awareness on the part of Job Providers as to the impact of their decisions to remove my only source of income at the click of a button. How they might then disengage in the process? Can you understand how frightening it is that a person who has no understanding of who you are, and what you might be capable of, has the power to remove your only source of income at the click of a button?

My daughter has a serious, life-threatening illness which required me to spend a night with her in Hospital. I called Job Provider B to let them know I would be unable to make my 10am appointment the next day and left a message. I was called that afternoon and told I would need to come in the next day at 9am or my payment would be suspended. When I explained the situation and reiterated that I had called to provide a reason for being unavailable I was told my reasoning was insufficient.

“If your daughter is not on disability and you are not recorded as her Primary care-giver then you must attend all appointments. Just because she was in Hospital does not mean you can miss an appointment. You have not met your Mutual Obligations”

My request to speak with someone regarding this was met with a statement that this was the advice from the Manager and would not change. My payment was suspended for two days.

Job Provider C is a disability specialist Provider. They are allowed to make appointments over the phone. Which I found very helpful. However, an appointment might be scheduled for 10:30am and I may not receive a call until 2pm. I try to organise my health appointments and study schedule around my Job Provider appointments. It is very unsettling to know that if the call does not happen at approximately the stated time this may delay or suspend my next payment.

Regardless of when the call is made, if I unavoidably miss it, I will always call back and leave a message (sometimes up to 3 times within a day) the same day as I am concerned that I meet with my requirements and am not suspended. I appreciate

there are Obligations for me to receive my payment and I wish to fulfill them. However, it appears that there is no onus or obligation on the Provider to keep the appointment time.

I took the initiative to enrol myself in Cert IV Community Services at TAFE SA and informed **Job Provider C**. I asked if there was any funding assistance I could apply for to help with costs or if I needed to contact Centrelink to see if I should be on Austudy. The answer was “No”. I contacted Centrelink and was informed that my Job Provider would have to make changes to my Job Plan and once that was done they would look at which payment would be best for me.

It took two weeks of going back and forth with my Job Provider for me to get my study on my Job Plan. The Provider kept saying that their system couldn't do it and that they were not “responsible to determine if TAFE courses were ‘approved’ by Centrelink”. They finally added my study to the Job Plan, however I am still unsure as to what my responsibilities are around this.

(Update: I had to report any income to Centrelink on Friday. I did so. I checked ‘My Tasks’ and there were none. I checked my ‘Job Applications’ and there was a notice that I had ‘No Obligations’.

On the following Wednesday I received a text from an unknown number saying “...*your payment is on hold for not participating in your activity. To restore your payment you may need to attend a day of activity*”, followed by a 1300 number. There was nothing in this text to identify where it originated. (I have to add that my ID was stolen as part of the Optus breach and loans were applied for in my name, so I was cautious about calling back.)

I checked MyGov and the Workforce site said my payments were suspended as I had not attended an ‘Activity’ and to contact my Provider and I also had to apply for jobs before the 19th of the month.

I received this text at 10:52am. I called my “Mentor” at 10:55 and left a message for her to call me back urgently as my payment had been suspended and I could not find anything on either the Workforce site or the Centrelink site to show what ‘Activity’ I had missed.

I called the 1300 number provided on the text at 12:12pm as I had not heard anything. I again left a message to please call me urgently as I was very concerned that my payments had been suspended.

At 1:40pm I called my “Mentor” again directly and left another message to let them know I was very concerned and needed to speak with them urgently.

I was called back at 2:07pm. After three hours of stress and not using my phone or going out in case I missed the call back.

I have to stress how restricting this is – you cannot shower, leave the house, call anyone else, and even going to the toilet comes with anxiety in case you miss the call.

My Mentor corrected the issue and sent an email stating, "All sorted on my end today" but there was no apology, no recognition that for me, this was a critical issue that needed to be resolved.

I still don't know what went wrong. I still don't know how to deal with this if it should occur again. And it has again today (17/3/2023). I had to ask three times for my Mentor to see if she could correct this issue. The response was "Well, I'll give it a try but I don't know..."

What I DO know is that I can lose any support at any moment, for any reason and I will have no control or even ability to fix things.)

To add insult to injury I received this email today,

*The **Port Admirals** will be re-opening again soon, and I am wondering if there is a position below that you might be interested in?*

There are 6 positions available, at this stage I have no further information on the specifics of each role, but if you are interested please complete the application form as soon as possible as the owner is looking to open very soon.

If you need help to complete the application form, please let me know

Here is the link for the applications

<https://form.jotform.com/230708836472865>

When I click on this link, it asks which position you are applying for. There are no details as to the duties required, hours, level of fitness required or qualifications that might be needed. How am I supposed to provide information to the employer if I don't have any criteria to address?

Additional Information

I have had many concerning conversations with those who have managed to find themselves work being harassed by their Job Providers to complete paperwork that would show the Job Provider as being instrumental in gaining these positions and thus allowing the Job Provider to gain additional funding. This questionable practice needs to be examined.

I would ask you to consider and recognise that those of us who are reliant on this system are deprived of any means to control our circumstances. A system failure, a missed phone call, a misunderstanding or a simple lack of communication can lead to a suspension of payments.

The stress associated with being constantly under threat by the whims of a particular person, system faults or even a missed phone call is immeasurable. That I might be unable to eat, go to the Doctor, pay for medication, buy petrol, pay bills on time (so as not to incur further costs), pay for internet/phone (which is now a requirement to meet with Centrelink & Workforce Obligations) is considerable and has a massive impact for those of us who are living under these unfortunate circumstances. It affects our physical and emotional health, our ability to participate in our communities, our sense of future and diminishes our sense of self-worth and our accomplishments – reducing them to meaninglessness while keeping us in poverty.

Suggested Improvements

- Required training for all job Provider workers around Compassion/Empathy/Dealing with Conflict and what services are offered through Centrelink.
- Direct line for Job Provider workers to a dedicated Centrelink team to answer questions and provide current, accurate advice that they can then provide to their clients.
- Better 'matching' of client and individual provider. Taking into account; age, gender, skill set, language and culture.
- Greater accessibility to alternate services (funding/community involvement/free training etc) and knowledge around options for support in returning to work.
- Recognition and training to Providers about the power imbalance between Job Provider workers and their clients and its possible repercussions.
- Subsidies for phone/internet connections, as there is a requirement to use either of these to meet with Obligations.
- Remove the requirement to apply for X number of jobs. This leads to Jobseekers applying for positions that they may be unable to perform to ensure they meet with Mutual Obligations. In addition, this adds additional costs to employers filtering through applications to find suitable candidates for the position they are looking to fill.