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The Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment & Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

For many years now I have been a volunteer with a large Church run charity. This experience covers Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. It is from this background of activity which prompts me to submit a paper to this Inquiry.

Any comments offered here is anecdotal evidence without the benefit of scientific supported research.

My experience suggests there are three main reasons for low participation in paid work, and the consequent need for income support to a wide variety of recipients. These three reasons are:

1. lack of education and/or inadequate level of work skills, either from lack of formal education/training or inappropriate training for any available work.
2. lack of full time job opportunities thus causing participation in part time work, casual work or periodic work, assuming some or all of these opportunities actually exist in the persons' locality.
3. the type of work opportunities which might be available in the persons' locality which are often lower paid when compared to a similar job in a different location.

It goes without saying that, in a minute number of situations, there are certain people who will not want to work, or cannot, no matter what the circumstances existing. These people fit the categories of:

1. medically or physically incapable,
2. substance abuse (alcohol or drugs), and
3. simply do not wish to work.

The following will address the issues of education levels, availability of full time job opportunities and locality peculiarities of job opportunities.

Education Adequacy:

Generally, I've noted a direct correlation between long tenure of un-employment to the degree of education and training possessed by the people we assist through the Charity. Most of the people I've had to assist over time have possessed a poor basic level of education and a lesser (low) level of skilled job/career training. For those persons of age 35 years and up generally have had very basic education and unskilled jobs throughout their working life to that point of time and generally were very reluctant to undertake job re-skilling training or education. When questioned on their reluctance to undertake further education and/or training, the answer generally was no perceived benefit to the training proposed by CentreLink. The general perception was that the training offered (some compulsory) was inappropriate to their skill base or inappropriate training relevant to the job opportunities on offer in their district. Training for training sake to comply with Government requirements!!!!

The corrective measures which needed to be implemented here include:

1. provide school leavers, and post school career starters, with more appropriate education experience applicable to the employment opportunities available in the ever changing Australian economic climate of today.
2. further to the preceding, school leavers, and early career starters, need to be instilled with the notion that they are likely to undertake two, maybe three, career paths prior to retirement and as such need to undertake ongoing re-education and re-skilling in their working lifetimes.

Lack of Full Time Work Opportunities:

In some geographic areas, more than others, there is often a lack of full time work opportunities. What work might be available is often casual, periodic or part time. An example of such would be my present living location of the Gold Coast. Here there is very little heavy industry, and, what industry is here is primarily small manufacturing and assembly employing few full time employees. The other major industry here is hospitality. With the downturn in this sector over the last two years, the level of full time employment seems to have dropped, with whatever labour requirements which are required being filled on a casual/periodic/part time basis. When questioned as to why the low employed person does not relocate to another area in search of full time employment, the answer is generally twofold, viz., the cost of relocation and the lack of conviction that another locality might prove more beneficial.

The corrective measures which needed to be implemented here include:

1. some degree of relocation expenses to cover issues such as rent bonds, removal costs, school uniforms and other allied costs.
2. a wider linked visibility system of full time work opportunities both inter and intra state, with electronic links from Centrelink offices to the prospective

employers for initial interviews. Some final interview travel assistance might also be required under appropriate circumstances.

Lower Paid Work Localities:

Around Australia there are locations which pay a higher wage for the same job classification. There are obvious supply and demand reasons why this is so. However, from a low employed person's perspective, where that person has some level of family support in their area, have a "reasonable" level of income and living in an area of choice, there is often a disincentive to improve their education or skill levels or go out of their way to seek an "improved lot" for themselves.

This is a difficult area to affect improvement in employment workforce levels. Perhaps this overall feature is a trait of the homo sapiens race. Without undertaking a comprehensive socio/economic study of this phenomenon I can offer no corrective measures, I only know that this is occurring.

Summary:

On the second terms of reference of your enquiry, "how a balance of assistance, incentives and obligations can increase participation, for income support recipients", I draw your attention to comments in my preceeding paragraphs.

I trust this has been of some assistance and I hope for some good outcomes from your enquiry which will assist longer and more rewarding employment participation to certain fellow Australians who are currently requiring assistance, both Governmental and Non-Government Organizations.

Yours faithfully,

Jerry Cleary