



**MOUNTAINS COMMUNITY RESOURCE NETWORK Inc.**

P.O. BOX 114, LAWSON, NSW 2783

Phone: (02) 4751 8792

Fax: (02) 4751 8763

e-mail: [mcrn@hermes.net.au](mailto:mcrn@hermes.net.au)

Committee Secretary,  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Employment, Education, and Workplace Relations,  
R1 Suite 116  
Parliament House,  
Canberra, ACT. 2600.

Dear Committee Secretary,

Enclosed please find a submission to the Committee's *Inquiry into the issues specific to older workers seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.*

Members of the group who prepared the submission, have asked me to let the Committee know that they are willing to give evidence to the committee in person.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Ryman.  
Co-ordinator  
26 May, 1999.

Submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into *The social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment, by a group of unemployed people in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.*

Submission to the  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment,  
Education and Workplace Relations' inquiry into:

*The social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over  
45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business,  
following unemployment,*

by

a group of mature age unemployed people  
in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

This submission is presented on their behalf by:

Mountains Community Resource Network,  
P.O. Box 114,  
Lawson, NSW. 2783.

Phone: (02) 47518792.  
Fax: (02) 47518763  
Email: [mcrn@hermes.net.au](mailto:mcrn@hermes.net.au)

Submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into *The social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment*, by a group of unemployed people in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

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## **BACKGROUND TO THE SUBMISSION.**

This submission is the result of the work of a group of mature age unemployed people living in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, and was collected during the course of a series of public meetings.

In February 1999 a resident of the Mountains approached the local federal member for Macquarie, Mr. Kerry Bartlett, about the difficulties she was experiencing as an unemployed older person. As a result of this approach she was referred to staff of Mountains Community Resource Network.

Advertisements were placed in the local press asking for volunteers interested in organizing a public forum on the issues faced by mature age unemployed people to come forward. This resulted in three meetings, which spent considerable time identifying the issues that this group of residents faced.

A public forum was organized by this group and held at Katoomba Community Health Centre on 19 May 1999. The forum was advertised extensively in the local press. The Forum gave participants the opportunity to tell their stories and experiences of unemployment, and explored and documented a variety of related issues. In addition a panel of service providers gave participants the opportunity to present their issues. The agenda for that day is included as Attachment 1, and a sound recording of the Introduction, keynote address, and panel discussion is included with this submission.

The material that formed the basis of this submission was collected at the two organizing meetings and at the public forum. Representatives of the organizing group wrote the submission. It represents the experiences, attitudes, feelings and responses of the thirty-six people who had a direct experience of being mature aged and unemployed, and who participated in the process of collecting this material.

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### Collecting the material for this submission.



Forum participants working in groups to identify issues



Meeting with the panel to discuss issues.

## KEY ISSUES

The following were the key issues identified by those participating in the meetings and Forum.

- **Impact of long term unemployment on the social, physical and emotional health and wellbeing of people.**
- **Discrimination in a range of areas, but particularly on the basis of age**
- **Financial difficulties faced by unemployed people.**
- **Social, structural and cultural definitions of work and reward, and links to the global economy.**
- **Relevance of the NEIS Scheme.**
- **Counting the costs of unemployment in the national accounts.**
- **Problems with service providers**

There is serious concern about the effect of increasing levels of unemployment on individuals, families and communities. Social capital is in decline. There seems to be little realistic support for the mature-aged workforce. There needs to be radical reforms in attitudes and thinking in order to restructure the manner in which people reinvent their lives and occupations. There was strong belief that government economic policies are aimed at good credit ratings at the expense of people in the community.

The Forum participants consider that building social and community networks as essential to ongoing the health of the Australian community, and that this should be part of the focus of a response to the issues faced by mature age unemployed people. To this end, they undertook to play their part by meeting as a group on an ongoing basis, exploring issues and ways of overcoming their difficulties.

## • **Impact of Long Term Unemployment on Social, Physical and Emotional Health and Wellbeing.**

Loss of employment can be equated to losing an immediate member of the family. The bereavement process is similar and is compounded by several associated losses, including income, self-esteem, self-confidence and social networks. However, this compounded grief rarely receives the appropriate attention it deserves. If a community is devastated by a mass-murderer, there is considerable support, counseling, compassion and sympathy. However, if a company downsizes, causing major losses in the workforce, there is no equivalent recognition of the devastation or support for the victims.

One participant at the workshop spoke about the 'downward spiral' that results from unemployment. At the beginning of the cycle, people commonly experience enthusiasm in the 'job search' phase. This gradually moves into a rapidly downward spiral including depression, loss of self-esteem, loss of hope and often results in increased drug, alcohol taking behaviour as well as feelings of suicide. The feelings of suicide are associated with feeling useless and hopeless.

As a part of the downward spiral are financial pressures, loss of social networks, loss of sense of place and position, loss of occupational esteem, stigmatization by the community and in particular, by government departments.

Men tend to have a more acute experience of loss of self-esteem and sense of purpose surrounding occupation. Loss of employment impacts directly upon close relationships and is often followed by a breakdown in key relationships and thus emotional health. These issues are compounded by discrimination against unemployed persons and the specific age discrimination as well as the politicization of the employment / unemployment debate, and attacks on unemployed people in the media. (*Appendix 3*).

Women spoke of the difficulty of accessing the employment opportunities by public transport. They believed that security on public transport is still very poor and were believed themselves to be in danger. Travelling to work may mean a two hour train trip with line changes, and this in the winter months being undertaken after dark. This adds to the level of stress they felt whilst trying to secure employment.

Many spoke of the humiliation of being in their fifties, with thirty years work experience and trying to relate to staff of employment agencies less than half their age. When maturity, skills experience built up over twenty to thirty working years, and the wisdom

that comes with age are dismissed as of no value, it is a devastating experience that does enormous damage.

There was considerable anger experienced that at a time of government 'surplus' and record profits, that people are being neglected. These themes emerged whenever unemployed people talked of their experiences.

The trauma faced by many of those who find themselves unemployed after years of stable employment is illustrated by Alastair's story.

### *Alastair's Story*

*From a personal experience of being ignored, I'd like to make a recommendation to the mature age Inquiry.*

*I was a public servant in a major commonwealth department for ten years. I had been given relative autonomy to manage my section of ten staff. What I went through at the time of my separation and the months that followed has been a traumatic experience.*

*I was shunted into a redundancy without consultation about alternatives or any consideration for my feelings or for my future. There was no recognition by the department of the contribution that I had made over the years. I suffered the indignity and extremely hurtful feelings of being rejected, even discarded.*

*Having been hired in the first place for my particular skills and having had those skills used and abused across ten years of very public exposure, I was then told that a restructure had no place for me. I was a "round peg in a square hole," and there was nothing further that I could contribute to the commonwealth government. This shocked me to the core, as I had firmly believed that my contributions had been of value and might continue to be so.*

*The greatest indignity was when I was offered - in my redundancy letter, not in person - that I could claim reimbursement of up to \$300 spent on financial advice, but no mention at all of any personal help, counselling or separation interview. There was not even a chance for me to tell the organisation what I felt or to pass on my experiences and skills to anyone else. A lower level officer is now struggling to do the tasks I was employed for as well his own job.*

*I would like to recommend that the Inquiry consider requesting Federal Government Departments to provide support systems and to offer reimbursement of counselling expenses - and to encourage redundees to seek professional help through the time of separation, loss, anger, grief and fear for the future. I don't suggest that in-house or departmental staff counsellors are necessarily appropriate. In my experience, the staff*



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*counsellor had few skills and even less empathy, certainly very limited experience at handling the effects of involuntary retirement (redundancy).*

*I would further recommend that senior management in government departments be supported by their ministers to provide redundee's with some funding and/or payment of,*

*change management seminars. I have discovered that there are organisations providing good advice about managing the emotional and physical effects of separation in the traumatic way I experienced it. But at a cost to me. I believe that it should be part of the separation process for the government to at least contribute to the costs involved.*

*As a mature age male (55), I have found I am not alone in experiencing difficulty adjusting to the thought that I am considered no longer useful.*

*Another recommendation I wish to make is that a way be found for the huge wealth of wisdom and knowledge gathered by mature aged workers, be used to mentor and guide younger jobseekers. Surely this cannot be too difficult - after all we can put men on the moon!*

- **Discrimination in a range of areas but particularly on the basis of age**

Experiences of adverse discrimination have already been identified in the preceding paragraphs on the emotional health of mature age unemployed people. A continuing theme of both subtle and blatant discrimination on the basis of age arose in the process of collecting material for this submission.

One organization has recently made a decision that they are not going to interview anyone older than anyone currently working for the organization. In other words, the 'employers' are discriminating towards their own age bracket! Recently, a job was advertised in the Blue Mountains asking for a person between 20 - 25 years old. Employers clearly perceive that there are advantages in employing younger people. It would seem, however, that they have neither identified nor understood the advantages of experience, insight and life skills of older people.

**Education of employers on anti-discrimination law and the advantages of employing mature age people are seen as a priority.**

The representative from the Anti-Discrimination Board at the Forum clearly identified that age discrimination is against the law, however this is not the experience of mature aged unemployed people when encountering the staff of various service providers.

A suggestion was made in the Forum that a mentoring program could be developed where mature aged people are matched with younger members of the workforce who require advice and skills and training. Additionally, regional and local centres for mature aged people to network, link and develop employment and business opportunities would be valuable - funded and managed outside the existing service providers. There needs to be a wider range of options to deal with the job seeking and business development strategies of mature aged people.

There was clear discrimination by employment agencies because of 'partner' status. For example, a partner may not be eligible for benefits because the spouse is working and therefore, receives less service and entitlements. One participant was already clearly stigmatized by local politicians and service providers because he had repeatedly addressed the discrimination he experienced.

Statements by employers that applicants were "overqualified" or "too experienced" for a position were seen to be just another way of saying that the applicant was too old for the

position. One participant perceived herself as 'over qualified' with two university degrees, and believed that she received less attention and support than someone at the 'bottom end of the spiral.'

Many training providers, including TAFE, discriminate in favour of young people in program development, marketing and training delivery.

Mature aged men find it significantly harder to find work than women do. They experience more direct discrimination and are less likely to obtain employment in administrative and hospitality industries. In fact, some people are told that there are only jobs in the hospitality industry in the Blue Mountains. There is a perception, that apart from chefs, women will be employed. Additionally, it is younger people who are employed because of the advantages of traineeships and lower wages. There is also a strong perception that many male employers want 'young skirts' for various reasons and would not touch an over 40 year old male! It seems that the paradigm of the 'young female secretary' with its sexist connotations has yet to be shifted and the media reinforces this perception.

In addition to age and gender discrimination, participants in the Forum reported experiences of racial discrimination.

Sue told us a story of how younger employers treat older employees.

### *Sue's Story*

*"You're unemployable," she said. "Employers do not want to have grownups working for them." So ended a five-year part time job. I was replaced by an older person who would double as nanny/cleaner/ office manager - unprofessional and far from emotionally grownup.*

*Having negotiated a life time of vicissitudes and tried to learn and grow through each one, I have now been thrown on the scrapheap by one who is unwilling to face her own problems, finding it easier to project her feelings onto her employees.*

*Where does a grownup find employment? Especially when faced with a market of emotional children fighting to keep their territory and pay less to inappropriate people who desperately try to be multi-skilled in environments becoming more fraught with tension.*

*I would like to make a recommendation to employers:*

- 1. First, process your own problems to minimise the effect on your workplace.*
- 2. Recognise the real skills of your employees - trying to do more with less is an insult to our intelligence.*
- 3. Mature-age workers are capable of "adding value" from their experience to a job, far ahead of that which a younger employee is capable. (eg Twenty-two year old bank managers)*

- **Social, structural and cultural definitions of work and reward and links to the global economy.**

The following poem by Karl was written as his contribution to the Forum.

***Branded LTU.***

*So it's my story you'd like to hear.  
But I have no simple tale,  
No straightforward narrative, no  
Career path carefully, doggedly followed,  
No beaded chain of triumphs to tell  
To ease the ears that itch to hear  
Of things familiar, safe, unmenacing.*

*No, my story is more confused-  
With opportunities missed, taken,  
High schools dropped out of,  
Challenges run away from, faced.*

*In the garret of the marginal artist  
A mess of charcoal, pencil, paint,  
Canvas by the acre, masonite, paint,  
Breaking the spirit, fading the eyes  
In cloisters of forgotten silence  
That fingers the pulse of dead old Latin  
Ears bent to a fading Gregorian heart  
Rinsed wrung by the Hebrew psalm  
In the learned halls of academe  
Wearing with honour the bachelor's gown  
The masters cap the published papers  
The lectures spun from a spinning brain*

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*Challenge confuse the many stories*

*Darkening Dante's mid-life wood*

*Where wandering lost the welfare tracks*

*Through gates bereft of hope*

*Spiral down a nether world*

*Of shades and shades and shades of gray*

*That weave and wear the branded letters*

*The L of Long the T of Term and U of Unemployed*

There was a strong feeling at the forum that the globalization of economies and emergence of multinational corporations with their specific influence on regional and national economic policies impacts on the nature of employment. For example, 'shifting companies and stocks' on the stock exchange has multiple consequences, including often sudden retrenchment of life-long employees with catastrophic effects on their own and their family's lives.

Additionally, there was the perception that governments are locked into regional and global economic practices, despite the 'glowing budget' that is presented by government. The reality is that people's lives are decimated by changes in the corporate world. The current trend to 'corporatisation, privatization and efficiencies' is seen as greed by executives, who enjoy increasing levels of remuneration at the expense of shareholders and employees. The inability of the government to cap executive salary packages across private and public enterprises coupled with increasing levels of retrenchment has dramatically escalated the polarization of wealth and the development of a poor underclass.

Many people felt pretty angry at the politicization of the employment debate and that they were 'pawns' and 'scapegoats' in someone else's game. The lead story in the Daily Telegraph on the day following the Forum angered many of the Forum participants. (See Appendix 3) The feeling was that politicians and the media should be sent the message clearly and simply 'lay off' unemployed people.

The following statement was made by one of the Forum participants:

*Statistics re: jobs advertised etc, do not reflect the extremely worrying trend towards loss of secure and full-time employment as a social and economic phenomenon. Structural and industrial relations reforms are decades behind this global economic trend. Coupled with this, there is extreme concern in the community at the current government's perceived 'union' / worker-bashing mentality. The industrial reforms of a century are being seriously undermined by globalization and a cabinet seemingly intent on destroying the community. Greed seems to override the health of the community. The ethic of egalitarianism is truly, non-existent.*

- **Financial difficulties faced by unemployed people.**

Money is power is opportunity is access.

For unemployed persons, income is below the actual rather than perceived poverty line. People find it difficult to find money for transport to interviews and buying appropriate clothes for interviews etc. Part-time workers lose the transport concession and find it difficult to travel. Rent assistance is available to renters, but is not available for mortgagees. Many people thus had to relinquish their homes and mortgages. People who had taken retrenchments and redundancies are forced to use the layoff money and utilize superannuation before they can obtain any assistance. They also had no access to financial planning. In other words, one's life's work and savings for retirement had to be forcibly used as a result of government and corporate policies.

Part-time workers found that they were penalised and often absolutely no better off over the course of several fortnights because of the structuring of Centrelink payments.

Many unemployed older people are not able to afford telephone connection charges. There is no assistance for rental bonds and the standard 4 - 6 weeks rent in advance. The housing list is long with complicated hoops to jump through in order to qualify. Some found the standard of public housing atrocious, often creating 'ghetto's in the community. In order to relocate and establish house and home, there are significant obstacles.

Telephone calls for Blue Mountains residents seeking work include many long-distance calls, often in peak charge times, with no concession for low-income earners. Telstra does not make it easy to obtain information on the half-price connection fee.

Small businesses, self-employed people, and home based businesses are numerous in the Blue Mountains. However practicing artists are not seen as working, in contrast to other countries such as Ireland, where being an actor, singer, or other artist is seen as an acceptable job description. There is minimal funding only and little support for writers, editors, literary agents and publishers. The Blue Mountains boasts a strong population of artists, musicians and writers, however, there is little structural and financial support for the individual artist. There is there little, if any, recognition that pursuing various art forms is a legitimate form of work and contributes to community health and wellbeing.

Centrelink requires declaration of income earned in the fortnightly period. For many people, such as freelance writers or contractors, the money may not arrive for several weeks. The 'worker' is left well and truly in the poor house! Centrelink mentality is seen

as punitive with strongly worded negative letters assuming guilt and crime. People find family allowance and Austudy not to be life-friendly. People on Austudy don't get rent assistance so they will not enroll in courses, retrain and upskill.

There is a strong feeling that part-timers, or people who do several part-time jobs as well as attempting to develop a home-base or small business, are penalized for their enterprise and initiative. There needs to be better networking support, incubator projects and so on to support small business. Advertising is perceived to be a major expense for small business, with the money going to the owners of newspaper chains. This and other costs are not taken into account when calculating 'fortnightly income' for Centrelink purposes.

Week by week living is the hard part and this is illustrated by Maggie's story:

### **Maggie's Story**

*In The Year of The Older Person would it be possible to do something for those who have worked 30-40 years and now find it impossible to obtain full time employment? While not wishing to encourage sloth, ensuring these people are encouraged to take whatever work they can get and allowing them to keep enough to ensure a well balanced diet and satisfactory accommodation would be beneficial to all.*

*The theory that under the present system taking whatever jobs you can get helps everyone is far from the reality experienced.*

### **THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS**

*Last year I was doing the 32 hours voluntary work and also looking for work. I obtained a two day a week – 32 hours a fortnight part time job at \$12 an hour, I was overjoyed. When I told those with whom I “worked” they just nodded and smiled and went on serving food, scrubbing pots and sorting old clothes. I could not understand their lack of enthusiasm when I was over the moon. They were not lazy, and the mindless, often back breaking work, was far below the capacity of most.*

### **THEN I FOUND OUT**

*The on going punishment by the government made my life hell.*

*After fares plus \$5 per week work expenses – up keep etc., I received \$66 per fortnight extra out of the \$386 I earned. My voluntary work was extended by 8 hours. My travel ticket was forfeited, meaning I now paid full fares even to voluntary work. My dole supplement was often late because it was to be handed in on a Friday and my work days were Monday and Friday. I could not fill it in on Thursday even though I would be*

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*showing a full 8 hours work on the Friday. If I changed my hand in day to Thursday I would lose one days money worked out on a five day week. I posted it and prayed. I posted it via employer – boss would post my letter to social security when they went to the post office.*

*Centrelink and the Tax department each pretended the other did not exist so both took money I had already given to the other. Allow me to show you how the \$66 I was supposed to gain rarely entered my hand on time, and in fact I was often in fear of losing the roof over my head, due to my efforts at employment.*

**FORTNIGHT ONE:**

*Went in with almost no money left as I had to buy new stockings, two skirts from Vinnies, and get my shoes heeled. The pay for day four was held by the employer however Centrelink deemed this as money earned and for this day alone extracted an extra \$67.20. Employment left me with less money than unemployment and because I also needed two weeks fares. For the first time ever I could not pay all my rent. The real estate agent was reasonable. I was highly embarrassed.*

**FORTNIGHT TWO:**

*Caught up with rent but still have less money to live on than when unemployed.*

**FORTNIGHT THREE:**

*At the end of this fortnight, having worked for six weeks I have that extra \$66 in my hand and can afford to spend an extra few dollars to stock my food cupboards, and had the first really good meal for weeks. I had been living on home made scones, baked beans etc.*

**FORTNIGHT FOUR:**

*My employer asked if I could come in for 4 hours on Tuesday. Oh joy! Oh light at the end of the tunnel. Oh NO! NO! NO! What would have happened is that the \$48 earned would be divided in this manner, Centrelink \$33.60, Tax \$9.60, Fares \$4.80, Me nought, nil, nothing. I juggled tasks and took home just under 3 hours work which saved time and travel. This fortnight I gained that \$66.*

**FORTNIGHT FIVE:**

*This was Easter so I lost work on Friday and Monday. Because the dole supplement is paid for the previous fortnight I was again destitute. I could not face the landlord again so asked a friend for a loan. After I put aside money for fares I had \$58 left for the two weeks.*

**FORTNIGHT SIX:**

*I received my catch up dole supplement for the previous fortnight, pay back my friend and buy meat and fresh vegetables.*



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**FORTNIGHT SEVEN:**

*Must pay electricity this week. The three months are now up so I only receive two days pay. I now receive the days pay held by employer, so although I again only receive a dole supplement from the previous fortnight, during which I worked four days. I only borrow \$10 and am told by my friend that I have been a complete fool and she had never known me to be as unsettled and lost as I had been during this period.*

**FORTNIGHT EIGHT:**

*Lose money for 2 days work from dole money.*

**THAT IS HOW THE JOY OF GETTING SOME WORK BECOMES AN ABSOLUTE NIGHTMARE.**

*I still job hunt. After working 37 years I still want to work and still look for work but not 2 days a week. Meanwhile, I scrub pots and serve food and when a bright hopeful face tells me guess what, I just got a part time job, I nod and smile silently and hope she can afford it.*

*There must be a system that works better than this.*

*When I moved in to this flat in March 1998 the rent was increased by \$5 per week. March 1999 I was informed the rent was to be increased by \$10. In this period my rent supplement was increased by 30 cents per week.*

*Jolly glad they are having a talkfest in Victoria about homelessness. Hope they are Rhodes scholars.*

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• **Relevance of the NEIS Scheme.**

Participants at the Forum who had experience of the NEIS Scheme had reservations about the scheme. In particular they asked:

- How much in total did it cost to run the NEIS program in 1997/98?
- How many people went through the program?
- How many started a business?
- How many are still in business?

There was a feeling that the money and time could be more effectively spent in cooperatives, direct business mentoring programs, funding for small business development including cost of capital equipment, start-up, and advertising.

- **Counting the costs of unemployment, social capital and economic rationalism.**

Policy development based on economic theory rather than real life experience is a dangerous game. The policy makers invariably 'blame' the recipients of economic policy, in this case, unemployed persons.

There was a strong feeling at the Forum that accountability needs to be built into the process. For example, rather than cost 'welfare payments' to the community, we should cost the effects of retrenchment into national accounting. A person with a workplace accident, broken leg or whatever, has distinct costs. What does it cost to the individual and community to lose work, self esteem, social networks, emotional health, ability to function in an expensive economy (travel, food, communications, housing, clothing etc.)

Restructuring and downsizing which results in cutting employment is 'false economy'! Beginning, middle and end of story. The health costs alone for stresses and bereavement associated with loss of employment need to be quantified.

Some participants felt that they in fact should be compensated for the losses accrued as a result of government policy, rather than be scapegoated, stigmatized and further abused. If the cost of loss of health and wellbeing alone were calculated as a result of loss of employment, then many people would have enough funds to set up their own small business.

The value of 'Social Capital' needs to be quantified in equivalent terms. The value of experience, accrued skills, level of education and miles on the board cannot be underestimated. Social capital also includes valuable networks, the development of the psyche and whole person.

Many participants questioned 'economic rationalism'. They asked such questions as "What is the government trying to do?" "Is Australia's overseas 'credit rating' more important than the devastation caused to thousands and thousands of individual people losing their occupation." They believed that the 'apparent' economic health of the country is definitely not matched by 'social health.' As evidence they looked at the consequences of loss of employment on the crime and drug use statistics.

There is a strong belief that unemployment numbers are kept high as a tool of economic and industrial relations policy.

- **Service Providers**

The relationship between clients and service providers was perceived as being abusive, particularly when policies and service providers repeatedly demonstrated inflexibility. The primary relationship between clients and service providers was in fact with a computer screen rather than a case manager or human being with their own life experience, capacity for compassion, common sense and reason.

Moreover, the service providers are not in a position to understand the wide dimensions of unemployment. Staff in agencies are often young in age or career-path oriented, locked into policies and legislation, and therefore, unable to comprehend or relate to the real life issues of people who have spent a lifetime in employment to suddenly find themselves on the 'scrap heap.' A 20 year old whose life-experience is a television soap on TV is vastly different to a person in their 40's or 50's.

Perhaps the Inquiry could consider identifying and targeting mature aged unemployed people to be the service providers. Many mature aged people feel that they can't relate to young people and to people who have never been unemployed. They often feel discriminated against, patronized and stigmatized.

Service providers clearly require sensitization to the range of issues faced by mature-aged people as well as customer service training. Rudeness, defensiveness and paranoia as well as stigmatization were some of the attitudes named by unemployed people in their dealings with service providers.

Government is considered to be remote to the real events of life and therefore, not in a position to accurately review the situation. There is also a strong feeling that some of the service providers are too close to local politicians and therefore are not detached and impartial.

The Forum expressed the view that the change in the CES / Centrelink / Job Network has had dramatic effects on the community. The change process in the service providers is in itself traumatic and the employees have experienced significant economic and cultural pressures. Service provider employees are dealing with mature-aged people who are thrust into a major life crisis as a result of loss of employment. Often, the mature-aged job seekers automatically assume the 'counsellor' role for the younger service-provider employees who demonstrate obvious signs of work-place stress.

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The service providers appeared to be straightjacketed into inflexible policies that generate punitive letters. The face of some aspects of Centrelink in particular belongs in an Orwellian world, rather than a mature and socially advanced society. There is room for much improvement, including case management oriented decision making, face-to-face rather than computer oriented decisions, decentralization of decision making, reduction in economic pressure on job-network providers, who in some cases, are competitors of people attempting to set up their own business, especially in the training area. The service providers employ people who are generally not experienced in losing employment and often patronizing and rude.

We stress that we are in Australia, a well educated and compassionate community. Why is it that we surrender our human skills to a computer?

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Agenda for the Employment Forum.**

*Note: The title of the forum was devised by the organising group. They were unaware that the name they had chosen was almost identical to a service provided by the Salvation Army. It should be noted that this group of people had no connection to the Salvation Army or its similarly named service.*

Submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into *The social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment, by a group of unemployed people in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.*

## Employment+Plus Forum

### Agenda

- 9.30: Registrations
- 10.00: Welcome and introductions *Alastair*  
Purpose of the Day and Federal Government Inquiry *Jyoti*  
Keynote stories *Jill, Karl, Tony*
- 10.20: Workshop 1:  
Sharing our stories
- 11.00 Brief feedback and note taking
- 11.10: Break
- 11.25: Workshop 2  
Issues for mature age unemployed people
- 12.05: Break
- 12.15: Panel
- *Kerry Bartlett, MP*
  - *Ruth Godwin, Centrelink*
  - *Karen Harris, NSW TAFE*
  - *Jim Wenman, NSW TAFE*
  - *John Felvus, Mission Employment*
  - *Richard Florczak, Mission Employment*
  - *Tamara Domicelj, NSW Anti Discrimination Board.*
  - *Col Parker, Department of Education, Workplace Relations, and Small Business*
- 1.20 Closure
- 1.30 Cleanup.

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## Appendix 2

### Poster for the Employment Forum.

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# EMPLOYMENT+PLUS FORUM

## An Opportunity for Mature Age Jobseekers to **HAVE YOUR SAY**

A forum to identify issues and concerns facing over 35s  
who seek employment or want to establish a business.

*Put your concerns to this panel:*

**KERRY BARTLETT MP**  
*Local Federal Member of Parliament*

**RUTH GODWIN**  
*Centrelink Katoomba*

**TAMARA DOMICELJ**  
*NSW Anti-Discrimination Board*

**JOHN FELVUS**  
*Mission Employment Katoomba*

**TAFE NSW**  
*Representative*

**YOUR VALUED IDEAS ARE NEEDED TO INFLUENCE  
A FORTHCOMING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
INQUIRY**

**NEXT WEDNESDAY 19<sup>th</sup> MAY 1999 9.30am - 1.30pm**

**At KATOOMBA COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE, 93 WARATAH STREET**  
**RSVP and ENQUIRES to: MARTIN RYMAN telephone 4751 8792**

**NOTE: The panel questions and answers will be recorded and broadcast on Community Radio  
2BLU 89.1fm Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May at 10am.**

<http://www.hermes.net.au/blufm/2BLUccfuture.html>

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## **Appendix 3**

**Example of media reporting that caused deep distress amongst members of the group preparing this submission.**

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popular university student Kim Meredith

WHEN Albury vagrant Graham Malles murdered university student Kim Meredith, he took a life he never knew or would understand.

She was a vivacious, popular 19-year-old, dedicated to her studies and a talented pianist.

Malles, a twisted loner known as "the Dogman", was yesterday found guilty of killing Kim by slashing her throat twice in an Albury car park.

Full report Page 4

# FUSSY JOB SNOBS

Daily Telegraph - 29/6/79

## Minister attacks unemployed

By ROSALIND MATHESON  
and WADE O'LEARY

MANY unemployed people are "job snobs" who refuse to do menial work, Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott said yesterday.

Mr Abbott said the unemployed should value getting any job.

"I have to say that I think that too many Australians have been too fussy for too long about the sorts of jobs they'll do," Mr Abbott said.

"I think there is a risk that policy in the past has created a kind of job snob, someone who wants to work but only on his or her terms.

"My own view is that provided it's not illegal, or not immoral, any job is better than no job."

He said Australia needed more people who were "prepared to have

a go". Mr Abbott told the Jobs Australia annual conference in Sydney it was important to attack the "unemployment cancer".

"I want any idea that might have been around of there being a human scrap heap of unemployed people ... to be consigned into history," Mr Abbott said.

"One of the paradoxes of modern Australia is that we have very high recorded unemployment at the same time as we have officially acknowledged skills shortages in hundreds of different occupations."

NSW Employers Federation chief executive Garry Brack attacked youth attitudes towards work.

"Young people have to swallow their pride and grab opportunities if they're offered," he said.

"The fact is they've got to start at  
Continued Page 4

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Business: P35; Comics: P41; Crosswords: P40; Lottery (6910):  
P42; Television: L/Rout; Weather: P28.

TeleClassifieds 9288 2000

Submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into *The social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment*, by a group of unemployed people in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

## Appendix 3

**Cassette recording of the Forum as broadcast on  
Blue Mountains Community Radio – 2BLU-FM.  
Includes keynote address, together with the  
questions and panel response**

*Note: It is anticipated that transcripts will be available on request.*

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