

Mr M Chan
 Inquiry Secretary
 House of Representatives
 Standing Committee on
 Employment education and workplace relations

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Dear Mr / madam Chan

Thank you for the invitation as an observer on the matter of mature age unemployment. Respectfully I have to decline for both cost and the fact that I would find it difficult not to participate in it. Though from the list of organizations participating I hope the discussions are more real than just the airing of stats or tired old arguments from the participants involved.

Since first writing to you on the matter of the unemployment of older men I think the issues facing them have become even more stark. The impact of on line employment applications through the internet will no doubt be welcomed by those who will grasp its spread but it would be devastating ^{to} for older unemployed wanting to be valued on face to face interpretation. It is bad enough being devalued by unemployment without having to get into your best clothes to be judged with the employer in absentia. The nature of the older unemployed calls for a hands on role despite the extra costs. Giving them a phone, a fax and a computer whilst useful tools for the present generation wont make the frustrations, lack of self esteem and loss of role any easier. Some it may project to help themselves. In many it wont, and they will continue to add to the job one until recognition is given that personalised caseworking service is the only way.

I think I've told you of my own experiences, though these days I tend not to think of them too much. The demise of the old CES had both good & bad points. There is no doubt it was a more personalised service where you were soon told whether you were qualified or not for the job. Its weaknesses were its inability or lack of funds to provide the whole service (training, education, caseworking) or a spread of jobs that would give it a more professional touch instead of casual or short term positions. There is no doubt some of the newer employment organisations are trying to offer a more professional service. Mission I believe is one of the better ones I've seen who actually look at what the prospect ^{we} employee needs to bring him up to employed status. They helped my son tremendously with patience, diligence & support. Though I don't know their impact for older unemployed but I would expect it to be some that's needed for successful outcomes. The present situation in social security centres is more often like a supermarket than what you would expect for job centres. I don't think it's entirely appropriate for older unemployed. They need a slower approach, someone to talk to, ^{reality} for direct, to be just told to go to an unemployment agency or look at the job bank. I think the tools provided are great & relevant for the young whose application skills are much more precise & composed than older unemployed. It's also true that the CES developed its own institution needs of offering a hurried but sympathetic ear and this is needed for older unemployed (The fact is that pride is often their greatest friend for survival but their greatest enemy for moving on.)

I personally believe that older unemployed but men in particular are undervalued both in the skills they have and the way they have been treated in the last 10 years or so. I also think that in most cases ^{older} women are more adaptable to the workforce than older ~~men~~. There are many reasons for this. I think the various womens organisations, pushed & supported by governments have raised the status and educational needs of women ahead of men. There is no doubt changing family needs, one parent families and the need for financial independence have all helped. The committee would need to look at the advantages given to women by government legislation on a favoured basis to decide whether men need the same status. At present men only have it as ~~an~~ historical fact and taken for granted that at all the indices one expects for a successful life. I'm afraid I'm a great opponent of much of this (womens) legislation believing it would have evolved anyway without the necessary devaluation of the male ethos. The workforce was already starting & formulating a process in the 60's for women away from the "homefront" into the workforce (a process that started in the second world war factories) and was further matured by the arrival of the "pill" and the choices it gave them their predecessors didn't have. I believe the devaluation of the family and the constant attacking of men even since have created problems that have since moved into the education of boys and the role of men as fathers, providers and partners of women. You can see a lot of the problems of the constant devaluation of men today in their male children's lack of a definitive impression of the male role model what has developed supposedly is the women's opinion of what is an effective male model through competition with them ^{rather} than the fact that they are different and complementary to each others needs which has been forgotten in the reaction ~~to~~.

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Surprisingly then when we look at mature age unemployment we need to see a lot more incentive to either contain or cure the problem. He states a lot of these organisations might show you of how the male ego is affected, might be impressive and properly compiled, but where will the answers be? To be the matter of retrenchment when you get the letter or see yourself on a retrenchment list. I went through that in 89, whilst you are always busy it is always someone else whose not, anyway (here is my way of doing things): Firstly large scale retrenchments should be passed onto the government, portfolios of individuals skills strength etc should be banked, a time period of a least 6 months for retraining etc should be given before retrenchment. This is needed for individuals to break the culture of their old workplace and begin to get used to the fact of a new one. For older people this is crucial, for migrants in factories etc even more so. My experience was that we would be given courses, counselling, financial assistance help by CES. we got nothing except a certain amount of money, we were cut off from other government jobs and told not to apply for government jobs for 12 months, support from the CES was negligible because they had neither the staff, money, or resources to do it. It should be mandatory that employers provide funding for retraining or contribute to it. The slower the process for older workers the better. The use of training in computers should be paramount. Help in adjustment, social, financial expectations and training needs must be always the first priority.

Anyway Mr Chan when I got made redundant we got 6 weeks and we were gone, cut off from other government jobs and our professional lives ruined. I was 47 and despite having 2 university qualifications I never worked full time again. So answer to redundancy is time for people to adjust and think through what is going to happen and I've been advised of its reserves available too them. I often think how unpalatable it is for someone with many years service to see their name on a list, what a cup of tea and a chat could have saved in emotional drainage to explain why he/she was being put off.

The emotional bank is always a great cost to government services. The biggest loss in the skills bank. In the old CES I used to talk to hundreds of people with all sorts of skills wondering what life had in store without a job. Many never returned to their previous professions and drifted into others. I fear a enormous waste in this country not just in motivation that is misplaced when unemployment occurs. I would suspect its fairly general right throughout the service & private enterprise when people are made redundant, lose their jobs or retire. I wonder whether in this information age we can afford to let so many, with so much to give so many be lost. I think of the prospects for voluntary ^{associations} ~~associations~~ Jape etc, if somehow these skills were not lost by those who slip away not knowing they could do so much useful work. Committees like yours could do useful work in this area. Redundancy could be seen as thing of value and not of shame ^{and} ~~and~~ make a useful contribution to retraining and helping those facing redundancy. Why couldn't it also be a positive thing. ~~the~~ volunteers who go through the process & are properly trained could save these resources for the future.

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Recently I went to a retirement seminar which covered all aspects of issues involved for that function. It was organised by the Old Government Super scheme for those contemplating retirement. Some aspects of it like recreation, leisure, social needs would be useful to your enquiry. It probably would be cost prohibitive but you would get some ideas I think. In the bottom line of redundancy is cost and that's where the government could help in having people with skills to help. How's this? If you had people trained to act as volunteers in the redundancy process and had been through it, why not use them to help. In my case I have professional counselling skills (post grad.) which I rarely use these days. I mean the Old Queensland Police are volunteers in all sorts of roles these days, and in all sorts of voluntary organisations. The workplace health & safety act though seems to limit government departments using volunteer skills somewhat and this would need to be addressed. The tax department could help by offering various types of refunds for expenses. Anyway, the moral begs what governments could do to offer redundant people help with little cost to them. As I say ^{older} people need time, a little sympathy, training and someone to talk to, whose been through it. I'd love to be there ^{to see what happens} and participate but as a silent observer, no!

Good luck with it nevertheless

John Luder.