

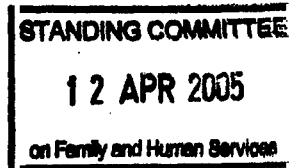
7 April 2005

SUBMISSION NO. 78
AUTHORISED: 19-04-05



The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Human Services
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: fhs.reps@aph.gov.au



Dear Secretary

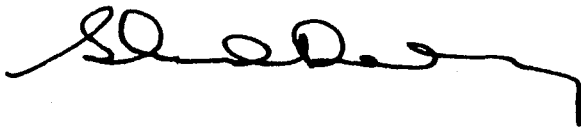
RE: INQUIRY INTO BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

As a large network of not-for-profit employment providers, *JOB futures* welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Family and Human Services' Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family.

Our submission focuses on the second point in the Terms of Reference, ie, "making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce", with particular emphasis on single parents.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of our submission in more detail, please contact me on 02 8281 2420 or Rachel Louttit on 02 8281 2498 or by email at rachel.louttit@jobfutures.com.au.

Yours faithfully



Sheridan Dudley
Chief Executive

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FAMILY & HUMAN SERVICES

Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family

***"Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to paid work."
[Inquiry Terms of Reference, (2).]***

Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Single Parents

Introduction

JOB futures is one of the largest not for profit employment services groups in Australia. Programs delivered nationally include Job Network, Personal Support Program, Transition to Work, and Green Corps which is delivered in partnership with Greening Australia. These programs are delivered in metropolitan and rural and remote locations, creating centres of local community-based expertise with national coverage.

Our organisation has a values driven commitment to excellence that aims to empower and equip individuals to maximise their employment potential and participation in community life. We achieve this through the provision of a series of diverse, innovative and outcomes focused employment and community services programs.

JOB futures supports current Government initiatives to encourage unemployed parents – both single and partnered – to participate in Job Network programs on a voluntary basis.

In particular, we encourage the implementation of an employment services model for people on parenting payments that:

- ▶ Offers appropriate opportunities and incentives for people who can work to move into employment.
- ▶ Takes into account structural needs, being travel costs, childcare, adjustments to income while transitioning from Parenting Payments.
- ▶ Takes into account social capital, being educational and labour market experience and community involvement of individuals and families.
- ▶ Promotes a rapid return to work where possible, and backs that expectation with services that build capacity, place people in the right jobs, and support both clients and employers to ensure people get a secure foothold in the labour market.
- ▶ Recognises the diversity of people's individual needs and outcomes, in respect of individual family structure and circumstances with a focus on the needs of single parents.

Identifying the Needs of Single Parent Payment Recipients

JOB *futures* recognises that circumstances of people on parenting payments vary greatly according to variables such as the age and number of children, whether the parent is single or partnered, their educational attainment, labour market experience, social factors, mental health issues and location. From an economic perspective, single parents whose sole means of support is a welfare payment, face a difficult economic future with structural disincentives to work, including prohibitive childcare costs, labour market opportunities, and transition to work costs that can involve an initial drop in income.

To assist in identifying the needs of single parents, Peter Butterworth from the Australian National University Centre for Mental Health was invited to make a presentation on addressing mental health problems and the keys to promoting participation and employment at the 2004 JOB *futures* National Conference.¹

In his presentation, Dr Butterworth emphasised the case for community focused preventative mental health treatment and proactive labour market programs, with the two working in tandem to promote economic and social outcomes for communities. He cited the ABS 1997 survey² which showed a high incidence of mental health issues among single parents receiving parenting payments. There was a correlating high incidence of significant traumatic events reported among single parent respondents including rape, sexual molestation, and serious physical assault. The prevalence of such events (over 50%) is twice that of other respondents.

Also stressed by Dr Butterworth was the need to address mental health issues as a primary focus, in order to achieve the secondary result of increasing the connection of single parents with targeted labour market programs and pathways to paid employment. He noted that poor mental health is a significant barrier to active participation in welfare reform programs and reiterated that it is essential to define the nature of the barriers preventing welfare recipients from active participation.

Over 60% of respondents in the ABS Survey cited three or more of the following:

- ▶ no labour market experience, rental or subsidised housing;
- ▶ not completed secondary school;
- ▶ residing in rural or remote areas; and
- ▶ residing in areas of social and economic disadvantage.

The high proportion of single parent families in subsidised housing, being 20% of residents in Department of Housing accommodation in NSW, has been highlighted in other research.³

The incidence of single parent families and unemployment figures is high in areas such as the Campbelltown-Airns estate and Mt Druitt estates. In Airns-Campbelltown, the levels for unemployment recorded from the 2001 ABS census data were at 30% as compared to 9% in other areas.

These figures indicate an urgent need for the development of multifaceted, flexible programs that recognise the existence of multiple barriers to labour market participation. It is clear that programs must be designed to encourage employment focused skills development while fostering the development of social capital, in the form of transferable skills addressing goal setting, problem solving, structuring of social supports within the wider context of community renewal and development.

¹ Butterworth, P., 2004. *Addressing Mental Health Problems A Key to Promoting Participation and Employment*. ANU Centre for Mental Health Research. Presentation delivered at JOB *futures* National Conference, October 2004.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997. *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*.

³ Hughes, Melanie, 2004, *Community Economic Development and Public Housing Estates*, p.12.

Meeting the Need: Program Development and Strategies

In recognition of the need to develop specific strategies and programs targeting at-risk populations in the community, Sue Williamson from Mt Druitt WASH House was also invited to present a paper at the 2004 JOB *futures* conference.⁴

Learning Circles for Female Lone Parents is a group program developed and trialed in Mt Druitt, NSW, using the group-focused non-didactic teaching method of Learning Circles. The program included work readiness training, job search skills and self esteem, goal setting and life management skills. The results of the program trial were positive.⁵

Learning Circles for Lone Parents

Number of Participants	32
Entered Paid Employment	14
Training	10
Voluntary Work	2
Possible Establishment of Small Business	2
Interview Stage / Job Applications	4

The results reported following the initial trial illustrate that the program meets the needs of skills acquisition, both in terms of employment focus and social and community development. Following the conclusion of the project in Mt Druitt, JOB *futures* purchased the program for delivery to single parents in accordance with sustainability objectives of the project once initial funding had been utilised.

The program is in the process of being adapted to suit the Job Network environment, with JOB *futures* sites across Australia electing to participate in a pilot study which utilises the Learning Circle Program as part of a return to work package to be offered to single parents eligible for Job Network Services.

Other proposed interventions for 2005 include a partnership between CHERE (Centre for Health, Education, Research and Evaluation) and JOB *futures* involving a trial of vocational oriented Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) with recipients of parenting payments at JOB *futures*' sites. CBT is a proven intervention for increasing capacity to self regulate anxiety and depression. It has also been shown to be an effective intervention in improving the health and employment outcomes of long term unemployed people.⁶

Employers

JOB *futures* encourages the adoption of a national strategy to increase the employment opportunities available to people on parenting payments should be adopted including an education program aimed at assisting employers to create family friendly workplaces that take into account the diversity of the family structure in today's society.

⁴ Williamson, S. *The Mt Druitt Story- Learning Circles for Lone Parents*. JOB *futures* National Conference, 2004.

⁵ From Community Builders NSW, 2004, www.communitybuildersnsw.gov.au. Crime Prevention and Community Development: "Women's Activities & Self-Help (WASH) House in Mt Druitt". <http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/solutions/mtdruitt/wash.html>.

⁶ Proudfoot J, Guest D, Carson J, Dunn, D & Grey, J (1997). "Effect of Cognitive Behavioural Training on Job-Finding amongst Long-Term Unemployed People", *The Lancet*, vol 350 (9071), 96-100.

Performance Indicators

JOB *futures* strongly supports the adoption of a process that will enable specific measurement of Job Network providers' achievement of lasting employment outcomes for parents returning to the workforce so that job seekers can make informed choices about the best and most effective providers of the services available to them.

Funding

JOB *futures* supports the development of DEWR initiatives to allow Parenting Payment recipients to access more intensive assistance based on individual circumstances and need. Given the incidence of multiple and co-existing social and vocational barriers, it is clear that single parents in receipt of the Single Parent Payment are in need of greater investment in terms of training, work readiness programs, work integration programs and specialised assistance. At present, funding for specialised services is largely limited to the Job Seeker account, which is restricted to those individuals registered as 12 months plus unemployed and eligible for Intensive Support Customised Assistance.

Conclusion

JOB *futures* supports initiatives that will enhance community and labour force participation of single parents and parents currently receiving Parenting Payments.

JOB *futures* supports the development of needs based early access initiative to the full spectrum of Job Network services for the purpose of maximising participation in labour market programs and paid employment with the target group.