



The Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Employment and Workplace Relations
R1, 116 Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Enquiry into the Social and Economic needs of older workers
over the age of 45 years.

Submission from:-
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1/. UNEMPLOYMENT

We have found that a lot of older workers are embarrassed about being unemployed in seeking assistance, this extends to them attending Centrelink offices to use their free facilities for seeking employment. Subsequently we offer this service to our clients. We will type a resume for under \$5.00 (takes 3 hours approx.), type job application letters @ 20 cents per page (takes 1 hour approx. as they usually apply for more than one at a time on average), typing up assignments for University or TAFE courses @ 5 cents per page (these usually take 3 hours to type), photocopying of resumes @ 5 cents a page and free local telephone calls. These persons needing assistance come and go. We loose one who finds a job, then maybe days or months later they refer some one else to us for assistance. Word of mouth and the ability to achieve are powerful referral mechanisms for new persons coming to our centre.

To quote some statistics:-

Our centre since January 1999 to 22nd September, 1999 received 1,059 enquires (These figures do not include persons attending classes or programs). Of these 116 were job related. Overall this is not many in number, but when you look at the amount of time it takes working for or with a client it evolves into 406 hours of time used or 1/3rd of the co-ordinator's time this year so far.

JOB APPLICATION LETTERS

AGES		-20 YRS	20-40YRS	40-60YRS
	NUMBERS			
MALES	15	1	5	9
FEMALES	19	2	10	7
TOTAL	34			

RESUMES

AGES		-20YRS	20-40YRS	40-60YRS
	NUMBERS			
MALES	18	3	4	11
FEMALES	21	1	7	13
TOTAL	39			

FAXES SENT

AGES		-20YRS	20-40YRS	40-60YRS
	NUMBERS			
MALES	10	0	4	6
FEMALES	5	0	3	2
TOTAL	15			

ASSIGNMENT WRITING

AGES		-20YRS	20-40YRS	40-60YRS
	NUMBERS			
MALES	23	0	13	10
FEMALES	5	0	0	5
TOTAL	28			

Our centre has had to restrict the number of days per week that we work on unemployment related matters to two (2) days per week otherwise no other work would be accomplished. As we are not funded specifically to deal with these unemployment issues, that is a lot of valuable hours used up e.g. 1/3 rd staff time. We tried a formal Job Club for our clients, but this was a failure, instead we assist people individually, we teach them how to write job application letters, how to canvass for work and how to correctly structure a resume.

We have in 1999 helped 17 persons find employment that we are aware of.

In our computer training classes this year to date 68 out of 108 has been persons aged 40-60 years of age. We don't get people "Job Ready" in computers, we get them to a stage where they can confidently go back to TAFE and complete a course or go to TAFE to start a course. When they come to us they are usually ignorant and afraid of computers especially when they go beep! We give them the confidence to move on.

UNEMPLOYMENT

- Older workers get embarrassed at being in the unemployment network.
- Our centres helps these people by offering cost effective services.
- One third of staff time is taken up with employment related matters.
- We restrict unemployment issues to 2 days per week.
- We have helped 17 persons to find employment this year.
- 68 out of 108 computer students this year have been aged over 40 years of age.
- We don't get people "Job Ready", just to a stage of going to TAFE to continue their education.
- We provide opportunities for people to access a range of employment options and training.

2/. SOCIAL PROBLEMS/ECONOMIC ISSUES

Our centre sees people who usually did not need our services. Many a time a mature age person who always worked before being retrenched has come to the centre and asked where they can get assistance to pay for basic services such as a phone bill. These persons are not usually the type to seek assistance and are usually embarrassed at having to ask for help. They are proud people, people who in the past have always been able to cope and to help themselves, so therefore, never acquired the skills needed to assist them to cope with unemployment. We also see the down side of unemployment, mainly Domestic Violence from persons who are stressed out looking for work and taking it out on loved ones. With the changing trends of unemployment, as more women enter the workforce as the bread winner we occasionally see the reverse side, more males are staying home to raise the children and perform domestic duties so therefore we see the odd case of females perpetrating Domestic Violence on males.

When one has worked all their life it can be very hard to handle the emotions/feelings they never thought they would have. Clients like these we refer to appropriate agencies for assistance. Partners and other family members are all affected by unemployment and in some cases the whole family structure may require assistance not just the person unemployed. We find persons over 35 years of age are employment disadvantaged.

We are in the process of establishing a women's group to help women cope with everyday life. Women who are suffering low self esteem, low self image after being continually rejected for employment. The first group is completed and the second group will start in 2000. If successful, we will look at an equivalent men's group.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS/ECONOMIC ISSUES

- * We see people about Domestic Violence issues
- * We see families under stress
- * We refer people on to the appropriate agencies for assistance
- * We see people from age 35 upwards who have not the skills for the job market

3/. TRAINING

Our Centre's volunteers are not through any "work for the dole" schemes. We acquire our volunteers through the NSW Mature Age Workers Program, the Hunter Volunteer Placement Service funded by the NSW Hunter Area Health Service and 2 Federally Funded Programs 1/. Volunteer Work Initiative program to assist Centrelink clients 2/. Volunteer Management Program which focuses on training and education for volunteers and not for profit organisations utilising volunteers and more recently through workcover authorities wishing persons who are retraining to seek valuable on the job experience.

We give volunteers valuable office or computer repair experience and they provide their service doing general office duties and teaching students how to use a computer or preparing computers ready for sale or to be given away. We treat our office volunteers as paid employees, and as such we pay them a small \$4.00 per day out of pocket expenses for travel out of income we generate ourselves (not out of funding). We give them confidence to work as part of a team and to work independently. In the five years this program has operated we have lost over half of our volunteers because they found employment.

Four (4) years ago a local industry (Pasminco - Cockle Creek Smelter) gave away free old "386" computers. We accepted two and started running our own computer classes. Originally we used TAFE OUTREACH who came along with laptop computers and ran this program but the demand placed on them to run courses at numerous centres was so high and the cuts to the TAFE System meant we could only get one class per year. So we started our own classes so as to free up this valuable service for other more needy centre's and to meet our own demands.

Eventually we expanded to four computers. The demand is now so great that we last advertised this program in February 1999 and so far we have filled both the February (8 half day classes with 32 students) and July 1999 (10 half day classes with 40 students) classes and have advanced bookings for February 2000 (8 half day classes with 32 students) and are now taking bookings for the July 2000 course.

We teach mainly 4 groups of people:-

1. Retired persons and early retirees looking to keep their minds active in their retirement and to communicate with their grandchildren.
2. Persons who are unemployed and who have never used a computer before and who need to learn so as to either seek work or to attend TAFE Courses to re-train looking for work. We have found that older persons find it harder to adapt to computer technology and need extra attention to get them skilled enough to continue retraining.
3. Persons who are currently working and need to either learn computers or upgrade computer skills to keep their current jobs.
4. Persons who are starting a small business and who need to computerise.

TAFE courses, as good as they are, are required to stick to a set lesson per day, unfortunately, if a persons basic computer skills are not adequate to keep up with the

class they fall behind and don't achieve. We often get these people who later return to TAFE and then do achieve. We have also had people doing advanced computer courses at TAFE or private training agencies without having the skills to be there. It appears that there is no course adviser at TAFE any more to advise people on course selections to ensure they follow a good proven path in their education.

4/. **STARTING A BUSINESS**

We have found that some unemployed persons come up with unique but workable business ideas but lack both the capital and experience to start and run a small business. We tell them about Provisional Taxes and the need for licenses as it is surprising the number of people who are unaware of these basic requirements as they also can't afford an accountant to advise them. I have just received a business package on the Newcastle Business Enterprise Centre's supporting programs but haven't yet checked their cost structure out.

We refer these people onto Business Enterprise Centres for assistance in the initial set up of their businesses, or onto places like WEA for business management training.

I was unable to obtain any information from the local Business Enterprise Centres about the NEASE Scheme. I was merely referred to make an appointment to see one of their consultants about my business idea who would then tell me about this program.

Our Centre's business venture (that is a program of the Neighbourhood Centre) Boolaroo Recycled Computers is experiencing the same growing problems as any other business that is striving to achieve in it's first 12 months. Our program offers people hands on experience to build/repair/upgrade old 486 computers which we sell to raise money for the Centre's programs or to give away free to needy families/individuals while providing a hands on learning environment for the unemployed. We have linked with Glendale TAFE Higher Technology Course to take their students on placement for hands on experience and training. This is working well.

SMALL BUSINESS

- ← People need assistance to set up and manage a business
- ← People need guidance and assistance for the first 2 years of their business

5/. **FUNDING**

As a small neighbourhood centre employing 1 full time staff person with funding through the NSW State Government - Department of Community Services - Community Services Grants Program do not have the resources to adequately cater for the increasing demand placed on our small centre. At present our centre has 10 volunteers. Nine of them are looking for employment and are volunteering one day per week to help the co-ordinator run the centre while utilising their skills.

6/. **ASSESSING CHANGING NEEDS**

Our management committee believes in change, change that meets the needs of our community. We ascertain the needs every two years, then design and implement programs that address those needs.

If the needs don't change then our centre does not change, but if our needs change, our centre changes to meet those needs.

We believe that centres need to keep changing, and not stay stagnant, running the same programs year after year, simply because they have been successful in the past.

7/. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ❖ Increase TAFE OUTREACH places and courses.
- ❖ A course adviser to guide people through the courses at TAFE .
- ❖ Funding to employ specialist workers to enhance the Mature Age Workers in the area.
- ❖ New approaches to helping and supporting persons start businesses.
- ❖ Funding to employ a worker to specialise in computer training for the slow learners.
- ❖ We need a Centrelink program that encourages persons to be a small business instead of the present system that on the surface appears to discourage this.
- ❖ More NEASE places and better information about the scheme to be readily available.
- ❖ Funding for free management courses for long term unemployed wishing to start a business.
- ❖ Lower the age group from 45 to 35 or 40 as the longer one is unemployed, the more depressed and disillusioned people become and the harder it is for them to retrain.

EXISTING SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE [not reproduced]