

LAKE MACQUARIE NEIGHBOURHOOD INFORMATION CENTRE INC.

Great to see that the Federal Parliament has initiated a Parliamentary Inquiry into older workers.

Unfortunately due to the increase in the workload of myself and seven volunteers I do not have time to submit a formal report so I hope you accept this letter instead. We are just a small neighbourhood centre receiving just over \$50,000 per annum catering basically for four suburbs but receive clients from outside our designated geographic area. Unlike larger organisations like the Salvation Army and Jobs Australia to name just two, we do not have the resources to meet this increasing demand, instead have to rely upon unemployed volunteers doing voluntary office experience to gain current skills and references to help teach skills to other unemployed persons

Every day this Centre sees the social and economic issues that affects unemployed persons aged 40 upwards and in particular women. We see people with low self esteem, low moral after being continually rejected by prospective employers no matter how good their work skills and work histories are. To overcome this we started a women's group to help improve women's self esteem and computer lessons to help persons learn computerisation and not to be afraid of computers.

Many older persons come to us for more personalised computer lessons rather than or in conjunction with the TAFE system which they find they can't keep up with in class each day and fall behind. Some of our people after learning computers then go back to TAFE competent at using a computer and learn vital skills

Due to this demand placed on our Centre we have had to restrict the writing of resumes, job application letters and assignments for TAFE or UNI Courses to two days per week otherwise this work would eventually over run the main aims of our Centre.

To help with this work we started a Unemployment Job Club to teach persons how to prepare their resumes, canvas for work by phone and letter, to provide photocopying for 5c per page and free telephone calls. We do this on an individual basis for persons as we found most persons are embarrassed to come to a club to seek help rather choosing individual attention and unfortunately, this takes time. Mature Age Worker Program funded by the NSW State Government, we work closely with. They refer persons to us for volunteer work, and we refer persons to them for assistance.

Since the closure of the Skillshare Programs there has been a marked increase in the number of clients using, our Neighbourhood Centre for unemployment related matters, to the extent that we now include unemployment in our Centre's statistical evaluation each year, yet we receive NO extra funding to cope with the increasing workload. Instead we have to rely upon our NSW Department of Community Services money to do this as a program of our Centre as a recognised need.

We have had many persons wishing to use their retirement/retrenchment money to start a small business or to purchase an existing business. These persons we send to local Business Enterprise Centre's, who unfortunately after helping them to do their business plan must charge them for ongoing work. This eliminates most persons from going down this avenue. I think it is well known that most business fail within the first twelve months due to lack of business skills and support for the owners.

In fact my experience with Centrelink is they are not supportive of persons trying to start a small business. I can remember three clients in late 1998 who tried to start small business while on unemployment benefits. The hassles they received about putting in forms and being available to seek full time employment caused two to stop trying and remain on unemployment benefits while one stuck it out and got his business working enough to go off benefits after 12 months after a lot of hard work and his business is thriving.

Unfortunately Governments come and go, each with their own ideas on what is needed and required. Yet the basic problem of unemployment is still there for a lot of people, this needs to be addressed across Governments eg:- providing a worker at strategic locations that helps unemployed persons prepare a resume, job application letters and offer FREE photocopying and postage facilities. This should not be confined to over 45's but for all ages including teenagers looking for their first job.

Because of the unemployment situation in the Hunter region, our Centre has just registered a business. This group is working as volunteers for the first few months till they have purchased required licences, insurances etc, then as the business grows they will employ each other. Later when the business expands they will take in and train persons who are unemployed and pay them for their work. They are called Bolero Recycled Computers. They receive donations of old computers, restore them, some they give away free to needy families/individuals and some they sell to raise money to buy at auction more computers to sell or give away.

Our local Federal Member Kelly Hoare MP Member for Charlton saw our group advertised and has donated her old computer to the group for recycling. We appreciate donation like this. Now we ourselves are in the first 12 month period of getting established, getting people to know we are here and expanding the business.

At least we are trying new ways to help meet the high unemployment demands of the Hunter in particular. With the impending closure of BHP and possible cutbacks in industries that used to supply to BHP coming this year in the Hunter we need to generate small business opportunities for locals. Many the time a person has told me of a unique idea for a business, yet was not competent enough nor was there any way of getting these free courses unless attending full time TAFE so they gave up and stayed unemployed.

For every NEASE place I believe there are upwards of 8 persons rejected. No one knows whether they all would have succeeded, but one feels there must be a system in place where people can go to.

On the other hand, working in welfare one see a lot of wasted money or ill spent money. What ever the Government decides to do, agencies who receive funding to help unemployed persons need to .justify yearly the continuation of the programs. As good as Skillshare was, being an unemployed person at the time using skillshare, 1 found workers relied on their first ideas for receiving funding to stay the same 10 years later. Needs in communities change. In fact our Centre examines the needs within our local community every two years and re-designs it's work plan to meet these needs. Something along these lines are needed. Just because you got funding last year to do this, does not mean that this year the need is for the same courses you run last year. One must keep moving forward.

Recommendations:

- 1/. More NEASE Places are needed.
- 2/. Business Enterprise Centres need to be funded to run free courses on keeping your business alive in the first 12 months and business management skills
- 3/. Centre's like Neighbourhood Centres should have access to funding to employ workers to meet their demands. It would be lovely to have a paid worker qualified to do this work to help unemployed persons.

Well I've had my say for the day, I hope you look at the needs of small centre's like ours along side the larger organisations as we also handle clients and are in touch with what is going on in the community and it's changing needs.