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I am a long-term mature age unemployed single male who identifies from continuing experience very strongly with many details of the social, personal and work-seeking experiences described in the report by JOBS EAST entitled Profiting from Maturity.

I was retrenched from highly innovative, street-level outreach targeting graffiti vandalism in November 1996 and have been unable to obtain regular employment since that time. The graffiti program was wholly donor reliant for the full eight years R operated and never received corporate, denominational church or government funding.

I have with practical long-term dedication more than met any "mutual obligation" of social contribution by addressing with exceptional lack of resource one very difficult adolescent negative behaviour that costs the Australian community \$200 million annually in repairs and criminal damage prosecutions.

I am very committed to resolutions and addressing social problems in a hands-on practical way. It is a tragedy to see young Australians, mostly male 13-20+ ruining their lives by involvement in graffiti vandalism. I have been pro-active in my efforts to address a complex emotional, spiritual and relational issue.

I struggled throughout the eight years on small donations from a tiny handful of church and community contributors.

I have made a very heavy contribution for a long period, in addressing a very costly juvenile offender issue, and existed far below the poverty line throughout. My average income as a youth worker was \$800 per month, with phone, transport and some other expenses sometimes met.

I am not privately wealthy, recipient of any inheritance or special benefit or income, nor have shares, savings or investment income. I am genuinely a contributor without material resource.

I have received very little thanks for performing a difficult interventory task that has prevented several suicides and has deflected a wide number of at-risk youth from further involvement in destructive behaviour and criminal episodes.

Since retrenchment that income has reduced to the standard Newstart Allowance of \$162 per week and I have found that amount extremely difficult to exist.

I lost a small flat and all furniture and personal possessions, in March 1998, just 15 months after retrenchment, due to lack of income and employment.

I now live in a transitional rooming house with 11 other adults, all unemployed and several receiving long-term psychiatric care. Thus far I do not need any prescribed medication, but I sincerely wonder how long it will be before I do.

I have become very depressed with a total lack of mental stimulation, loss of personal identity and self-respect, and constant rejection after 370 job applications in the subsequent 30 months of unemployment. All personal networks of past community and business association have gone. I have no friends and find myself on a merry-go-round of professional referrals.

INTENSIVE ASSISTANCE

I vigorously sought participation in the Job Network Intensive Assistance program and was referred to Box Hill (Victoria) Employment National. It took six in-person visits to achieve an interview with my case manager.

I got 45-minutes and presented 15 pages of work search and skill evaluation documents to the case manager. I also presented several resumes and a personal list of transferable job skills. I requested he read this material and give me a second interview. I wanted to be assisted on a continuing basis; I thought that identifying and overcoming hurdles to employment was what Intensive Assistance was all about.

"I'll call you if I have something. My job is mostly to help clients write a resume and to encourage them to look in weekend newspapers for job information. You are clearly doing all that already. No, you cannot have a further interview. I will contact you if I have some job information," was his reply.

For the next 12 months I received NO ASSISTANCE and no further information or career counselling. The government pays a considerable fee for clients like myself to be referred from Centrelink (about \$1200) and my experience tells me that in this case it was all for nothing.

Near the end of the Intensive Assistance period (May 27, 1999) I responded to more recent advertising by Employment National about its service for job seekers and made an appointment at Box Hill with a new case manager for 11am Friday, May 14, 1999.

On the morning of the appointment I received a phone call at 9am from the new case manager advising she had read my file and "whereas you will be off our books in a two weeks, we really cannot help you and apologise." It was quite clear there was nothing to be achieved by having an interview. Employment National cancelled me out but had already banked a substantial fee!

I am extremely upset.

There are penalties in law for me if I fail to look for work or give false and misleading information about myself. I am reminded of this every time I fill in a Centrelink report form. What penalty is there to Job Network agencies who simply never see an Intensive Assistance client who is requesting help?

FURTHER TRAINING IN RETAIL

I undertook in February and March 1999 an entry-level Retail Operations Certificate I course at Victoria University. I have three years full-time previous experience selling men's clothing in Canada but have been varyingly told I am either over-qualified or need to demonstrate "more recent retail skills" or that "we have never heard of Sears Canada department store".

The course was sponsored by Dulux as a unique opportunity for job seekers.

I participated keenly and was commended in class and throughout store work experience for having demonstrated high levels of retail competency.

When the course began, Dulux had 19 vacancies with expressed intention to fill several "from this course." No direct information was given in class or at the job site by Dulux management. I made verbal and written application and heard only "we are not hiring, we are cutting back 30%".

I determined at least I have eight-weeks accredited entry level training behind me and made new inquiry about a retail traineeship with a grocery supermarket or clothing store. As soon as I mentioned the certificate course, the barrier went up.

"You are now over-qualified for a traineeship. The course has covered what is taught in 12 months. If you pursue higher levels like Retail Operations Certificate 2, 3 or 4 employers will not be able to receive government traineeship funding."

Which ever way I turn to try and get work I encounter a barrier. Age is a SUBSTANTIAL IMPEDIMENT and no one can tell me how to exist for the rest of my days in a depressed, materially restricted and mentally unstimulated state.

If it benefits the Australian economy to down-size and streamline, what benefit does it provide to increase massive human strain on employable mid-life residents? The social cost for me has become very high and I often think about suicide. I am not alone in my feelings. I am now just a statistic.

How do you, the committee, suggest I now spend my days?

How do you, the committee, divide \$162 Newstart Allowance into a sustainable budget for the rest of your days?

I am totally satisfied with all Centrelink staff. This agency is the monitoring and delivery arm of government policy. Several Centrelink staff have been very understanding and supportive of my genuine hardship case and have shown more awareness than the Job Network members. They have my appreciation!

Please review urgently all programs and procedures affecting every unemployed person over the age of 40 years. Please do more than gather documents and hold conferences. Surely the research of JOBS EAST is sufficient for government to act.

Yours sincerely,

Noel Buchanan

"The true measure of any civilised society is how it treats its most vulnerable members."

- Senator Brian Harradine, 14 May 1999