

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations
Suite R1 116 Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600.

Inquiry into issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.

Summary.

The general feelings and information we have discerned from our clients can be broken into the following categories:

Social:

- Less self pride and loss of confidence
- Withdrawal from society
- Various levels of despair and desperation
- Frustration
- Disenfranchised – more pertinent to males, indicated by the lower number who enrol in courses at the college

Economic:

- Expect to maintain lifestyle on limited incomes
- Often do not have large cash reserves and little income
- Single females particularly, have little superannuation and it is often spread across various accounts
- Limited potential to survive on low income pensions.
- The higher cost of employing and training an older person

Technological:

- Find it very difficult to adapt to the changes in technology
- Perception that technology is advancing faster than their ability to learn
- Resistance to change and learn.

Government:

- The inequality of resources, programs and funding applied to 45+ age group compared to youth.

Background.

The Central Coast Community College is located as part of the Central Coast Campus at Ourimbah. In the past year there have been approximately 6400 enrolments, the majority being female between the ages of 20 and 60. The College offers Business Training, General interest courses, Computer training, Accredited (VET) courses, Literacy/ESL courses and Government training contracts (including NEIS and AIN recognition).

NEIS Program

The Central Coast Community College is a job network member, offering services to the unemployed members of the community through the NEW ENTERPRISE INCENTIVE SCHEME (NEIS). The College also offers business and general community courses.

Since the inception of the job network in May 1998, the College has assisted develop 98 new business people through the NEIS program, across all age groups and cultural backgrounds. In an average week there are between 7 to 12 calls made in response to the college's advertisements for the NEIS program. These applicants are assessed and brought to interview for potential viability.

Across all groups who have completed the course there are approximately 40% of the total number who are in the 45 or over bracket. That is there are 39 people over the age of 45 who have moved from unemployment to self employment in their own businesses.

In this category, most people or their partner have been made redundant or have been unemployed for a period of time. They have generally little financial debt and have the necessary capital to commence a small business operation.

In most cases they feel frustrated with the employment processes such as Centrelink. A recent circumstance, where a young person at Centrelink interviewed one of our clients and commented that he "should not be looking for Newstart Allowance" as she looked at the sum of money he had invested. This invoked a high level of anger and frustration for the client and he was astute enough to follow it up with the local manager, who took some action to get him on benefits and counsel the staff member. This story is not uncommon or rare.

Another lady of 55, was told that "you should get used to the benefits", as she "was unlikely to get a job". This demoralisation creates a need for counselling prior to the commencement of any of the necessary small business training.

In many cases the people attending the NEIS program, have had a very dented ego, as they have moved from positions of authority and power in an

organisation to being in the subordinate role or sitting at home with time on their hands and no clear direction.

The trainers often have to complete hours of counselling and rebuild the self-esteem of the individuals who register for the program. This is more prevalent in the 45+ age group.

There is a similar relationship paradigm shift to retirement when the bread winner is suddenly at home and in the way of the normal routine. For many older persons, this is a difficult issue to deal with and it often leads to marriage breakdowns and family disputes. The individual roles held dearly have been suddenly changed and stretched.

This group of people have often been disassociated with a learning environment for a long period of time and the thought of being in a classroom for six weeks can seem daunting and if not totally overwhelming.

It is a pleasure to see the personal growth and contribution offered by the more senior members of the group to its younger participants, especially as they develop self-confidence and relish the recognition of their valued life and business experience.

We have also found that there is a number of older people who have literacy problems, and have difficulty in expressing their thoughts on paper. This would be the case in approximately 5% of clients in the over 45 age group.

Our clients over 45 often indicate a true fear in returning to the workforce in a subordinate role, or fear that their work history intimidate those who are recruiting them. As previously mentioned some of our clients have held high level positions in large companies or departments and can have troubles adapting to re-entering the work force.

Self employment is seen as a positive venture for all ages and fits well with long term experience. As a general trend, those who are over 45, will make every attempt to ensure the success of their business and its long term viability.

The NEIS program allows people in the 45+ age bracket to utilise their skills and apply their knowledge and experience to the benefit of their business, the community and their own selves.

Unlike the College in general, there is a relatively equal mix of men and women who participate in the NEIS program, in fact the most successful are husband and wife partnerships who work together to be successful, each using their own strengths to make the business viable.

Other Programs.

The Assistant in Nursing Recognition course, also attracts a significant proportion of people who are in the 45+ age bracket.

This program is a recognition program to update the skills and provide accreditation to health care staff who have not attained registration. The course is designed to increase the employment opportunities of those enrolled and increase their long term job prospects.

Students in the 45+ age category, often excel in these courses due to their life skills experience. There is a definite need to be aware of the issues of literacy and numeracy, also the social and family aspects of returning to study.

The College also conducts other short term employment related courses, such as "Traffic Controllers Course". This course is RTA approved and allows successful students to enter roles with State, Local Government and other contract companies. The college recognises that it is not always easy for unemployed people to pay the full amount for these courses and students who are unemployed are given a reduced enrolment fee.

Many of the participants on the Traffic Controllers Course do not have high education levels, may have been long term unemployed, may be over 45 and have a limited work history in labouring or a related field.

This submission was prepared by Mr Chris Currey (Trainer on the NEIS program) on behalf of the Central Coast Community College.

Signed . *Chris Currey*
Date. 26 May 1999

Approved by Acting Director, Gaye Follington.

Signed. *Gaye Follington*
Date. 26 May 1999