

2 Tilba Avenue
BALMAIN NSW 2041
29 July 1999

MATURE AGE UNEMPLOYMENT

My letter was prompted by a short article in The Sydney Morning Herald of 9 June 1999, "*Harrowing tales from older jobless*" (see attached). The article stated that the Federal Government has launched an inquiry into the plight of unemployed people over 45.

As you have been appointed to head the inquiry I am writing to you as I have been one of these discouraged job seekers since I was made redundant in late 1994. I have tertiary and postgraduate qualifications and worked as a policy analyst and speechwriter in a large state government bureaucracy. Over the past five years I have worked in a number of part-time and casual jobs, or so-called "*junkjobs*" which embrace a range of service workers in customer service call centres and market research (the "sweat shops" of the 1990s) Such jobs are highly routinised, underpaid and with no autonomy. I am certainly no "*job snob*" and have been prepared to undertake this type of work with the hope of finding more meaningful employment in the future.

The main purpose of this letter is to draw your attention to the Recruitment & Consulting Services Association (RCSA), which is the only professional body involved in recruitment in Australia. This industry states that it is dedicated to achieving the highest standards in recruitment and employment services and that clients are supposedly covered by a Code of Ethics. Sadly this is not the reality for many discouraged 45+ job seekers. During the course of my job search I have registered in person with many recruitment agencies, and I have found like many others that age discrimination is a major barrier to obtaining employment. This Industry is largely unregulated and you have little recourse if you believe you have been unfairly treated. During the course of my own research I found that virtually anyone can establish a recruitment agency in NSW, with the only criterion being that you are not a known criminal. Consultants are not required to be licensed or qualified. The lack of regulations surrounding the industry has already been raised in the NSW Parliament.

I am aware that the RCSA plays an important role in providing advice to government and business on employment trends and issues. So in July 1998 I decided to set up a meeting with the Vice President of the RCSA to inform her of my negative experiences and of the problems facing other mature age job applicants. I was very candid in explaining the issues involved and the poor treatment of 45+ people by these agencies. During the course of the meeting she acknowledged the problems that existed and was shocked by some of the information I presented. Following the interview I wrote and thanked her for the time she took to listen to the issues raised. I also hoped that she would take the issues that needed to be constructively addressed to the executive of the RCSA for development in future industry policies and initiatives. However, she did not bother to pay me the courtesy of responding to my meeting or letter. As you can imagine it only reinforced my very negative opinion of this industry. Whilst I fully appreciate that recruitment agencies are commercially driven, it makes good

business sense to recognise the need to maintain sound working relationships with both employers and employees and to obtain feedback from both.

During the course of my ongoing job search I have not relied solely on gaining employment from recruitment agencies. I have used a combination of responding to job advertisements in newspapers, networking and obtaining assistance from community based employment services (e.g. the Mature Workers' Program). The latter have been helpful in assisting me and also giving strong moral support to disillusioned 45+ job seekers. During 1995/6 I undertook a voluntary placement followed by part-time paid work for a year at the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW. I am very aware of much of the valuable research being undertaken by the centre in the field of mature age unemployment. However, they have not undertaken any research into the operation of the recruitment industry. An investigation into this major player in the industry appears to be long overdue.

Over the past five years I have gathered a great deal of information on mature age unemployment and have been a discouraged job seeker, so I am very aware of the ongoing age discrimination and the real hurdles mature people face in obtaining work. If the Federal Government is genuine in its attempts to address these problems in a constructive way it needs to look at long term solutions. Many 45+ people are forced to draw on their superannuation savings in order to meet normal living expenses when they experience difficulty re-entering the workforce. If this trend continues, many baby boomers will be forced to seek the aged pension much earlier and in greater numbers.

I look forward to hearing back from you about the issues I have raised in this letter. I would also be happy to discuss my experiences with a member of your team. As I am currently working in a part-time position (15 hours per week), the best time to contact me by phone is between 4pm and 6pm weekdays or at the above address.

Yours sincerely

Anne M Collins

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