

Mature Age Unemployment Inquiry

24 May 1999

In response to your request for input from mature age unemployed [people, I offer the following:

In Feb 1992 I was forced to take a 'voluntary' early retirement from IBM, at age 52 and after nearly 20 years service as a computer technician latterly running the customer service centre in Brisbane.

I was given a reasonable package, but in order to avoid losing much of it I had to leave it tied up until I reached age 55. Fortunately DSS decided that I was eligible for the dole, and my wife and I existed on that for a number of years, augmented by delivering junk mail around the suburb. Thus kept us fit, but the returns were not worth the looming physical cost of the labour so we packed it in after about 5 years.

For the first year I tried applying for numerous jobs, but it became obvious by the total lack of responses that I was basically unemployable; prior to joining IBM I had worked as a fitter/welder for a number of years after migrating from the UK in 1971. I served 12 years in the RAF as a General Fitter before that, being demobbed with the rank of sergeant.

I took a TAFE course in welding but found that my eyes were not up to the task any longer, besides which, no employer would take on someone after nearly 20 years out of the trade. My study of sit vac ads convinced me that most employers put totally unrealistic conditions down for any prospective employee, and were not prepared to train anyone in the slightest degree.

I attended various DSS training sessions, but all training is geared to young people, and I wasn't keen on becoming an office boy, a lawn mower or to cook hamburgers....luckily my part time deliveries excused me from most of DSS attention. However, there is absolutely no incentive to earn more than the basic minimum allowed as you immediately lose half of any deductions from the dole. Unless you can walk straight into a full time job for around \$500pw it's better to stay on the dole....

In 1977 the government changed the rules regarding the assessability of super when paying the dole; this caused us to rearrange our investments to provide some income and allowed us to give up the deliveries whilst still maintaining a reasonable, if limited, lifestyle.

I also took advantage of the ability to do volunteer work instead of going through the motions of looking for work. I am involved in the Qld Steam & Vintage Machinery Soc at North Pine Country Park, the Brisbane Sciencentre and lately, the Redcliffe U3A. These keep me adequately occupied, and have enabled me to regain the self respect I lost when I found I was unemployable, and enable me to feel I am doing something useful with my life.

So far, all government initiatives to help mature age unemployed have been quite irrelevant to my case. It seems that the rate of change in business today is so great that experience counts for nothing; there is also a widely held belief the no manager will hire anyone older than himself/herself. I freely admit that I would have no chance of holding down a job in the computer industry today, or as a fitter/welder.

So what can be done? I see a whole generation of men drifting along unwanted and with no hope of employment. It would be good if voluntary organisations could be funded to offer voluntary work to mature age unemployed people that would benefit the community and supply these people with something useful to do. Unfortunately, any government funded scheme is so hopelessly tied up with red tape that no-one in their right mind would attempt to get involved. The recent work-for-the-dole scheme is a classic case. The amount of paperwork involved is completely beyond what any volunteer organisation would be prepared to undertake. It smacks of bureaucrats simply justifying their existence, knowing full well that their demands are quite unrealistic.

Maybe the funding would be better aimed at paying secretary/accountant to undertake the paperwork involved, thus freeing voluntary organisations to get on with running their societies, and also make funding available for reimbursement of volunteers expenses for day to day operation of the societies, without always tying funding to specific projects that are always required at impossibly short notice! If this paid, professional help were made available to voluntary groups, it would also employ some unemployed secretaries and accountants, as well as encouraging other people to join the societies and get a life again.

I hope these comments are of use to the inquiry; I can be contacted at my address is 18 Gareth St., Bracken Ridge, 4017, and my email address is sandave@bytesite.com.au.

Yours sincerely, David Harper now aged 60 and looking for the "mature age allowance!"