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To the Standing Committee on Issues Specific to Workers over 45 Years of Age

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Following my appearance before the committee in Brisbane yesterday, I would like to add a few extra observations in response to the questions I was asked.

1. Payment for voluntary work for over 45s

Although I agreed with this in principle when I was asked yesterday, as I thought through the implications, I realised it would need very careful consideration to develop a workable scheme. An immense amount of work is already done by older people in many community and charity organisations and I could envisage resentment from some if certain new recruits were being paid for their work while long-standing volunteers continued to give their time for nothing. People on old age pension and others with very limited income might feel such a system is unfair.

I could see this working best if there is a government-registered volunteer force (with unemployed people of all ages) to which community organisations could apply for extra help for specific projects (specifying skills and estimated time needed). The volunteer force co-ordinators would then identify suitable people in the area and draw up some sort of contractual arrangement with them.

There is still the risk that an unknown quantity of current volunteers would sign up to get paid for what they are already doing, or that they would resign from their current voluntary efforts to get allocated to paying projects.

On the plus side, it could give hard-stretched organisations extra resources and expertise while giving unemployed people a chance to do something rewarding in every sense of the word.

So, in conclusion, my answer is now a conditional yes on this one.

2. Role of Employment Network

I was asked if I had found the Employment Network helpful and I may not have made it clear in my answer that I have not tried it, having already given up hope of finding conventional work by the time this new system was in operation. In fact, I have now got far enough with writing books and running associated workshops that I would not like to give it up for a full time job. Ideally, I need some guaranteed, well-paying work for 2-3 days each week which still gives me time for my creative writing – perhaps I should try Employment Network for that? Freelance corporate writing projects occasionally help bring in some money (Queensland Writers Centre has given me one or two useful referrals through their employment service).

3. Do men or women over 45 find it harder to get work?

I'm sure the organisations working with unemployed people are better qualified to give an answer on this, although I would suspect there might be different answers for different industries and different types of work.

A few of the points I was thinking of in my submission are:

- ◆ that women have often been out of full-time work longer if they have children and are therefore perceived as being more 'out of touch' with the latest developments in their industry,
- ◆ that in certain service industries in which women play a large part, an 'attractiveness' factor is either deliberately or instinctively taken into account and this disadvantages the older woman when in competition with a reasonably-presented younger one
- ◆ that we are used to older men in powerful positions (most leaders of government and industry) but society doesn't yet have many good role models or stereotypes for powerful, effective older women

4. Are costs of further education a deterrent?

Assuming the unemployed and sole parent pensioners can still get government sponsorship to undertake shorter, specific courses to enhance their likelihood of finding work, I don't think there is a problem in this area but certainly the thought of managing finances for three years at university would be daunting to me.

I realised in considering this later, that I'd never seriously thought of going to university full time for this reason – I've thought of studying part time so I could still take on some part-time work and home duties but then the time factor of six years is too daunting.

5. Priorities for funds available to help over 45s

This one is hard to answer without being in the position of knowing how much is available, the cost of implementing different initiatives and the numbers that would benefit.

I may no longer be typical of the group in question, having committed myself to a new independent career path and, having had three books published, I

would like to persevere with my creative writing and try to get it established as a financially viable proposition at least while my daughter is still at home and I qualify for the safety net of sole parent pension. If it is not paying its way by the time my daughter finishes school (another two years), I may well be in the position of having to look for full time work again.

Speaking from my own point of view, more writers' grants for over 45s would be good as would anything that helps me find part-time or short-term contract positions to subsidise the time I spend on the books (which don't earn very much in royalties).

Thinking more broadly, I think a campaign to get employers to 'interview all ages - you might be surprised' would be as good a help as anything can be in the current job market (I still stand by my original call for a much more fundamental initiative so there is not such massive competition for each job). I feel a number of the over 45s (even over 40s) trying for jobs would feel encouraged to at least get to the interview stage and have the opportunity to demonstrate their worth. It wouldn't guarantee they wouldn't still meet prejudiced decisions but putting a face to the person makes it a little more likely they will be seen for their merits rather than as a stereotyped 'older person'.

I hope this is of use in expanding my answers from yesterday.

I look forward to hearing the recommendations of your Committee.

Julia Holland