

Andrew John Dawe  
212 Curlew Court  
Semaphore Park SA 5019

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Dr Brendan Nelson (MP)

Dear Dr Nelson

I heard your interview on 5AA this morning concerning the investigation into the difficulties faced by older unemployed people in the community. I decided to take this opportunity to submit some personal experiences and ideas.

I turned 45, three months ago and understand first hand what we "oldies" are facing in the employment market in our society today. After hearing that a "Work for the Dole" scheme for older people was being considered I made enquiries about my suitability. As someone who has worked for most of my life and having been brought up to "pay your own way", I wanted to enrol. I was hoping that my participation would lead to full time work or at the least I would earn the money I receive from Social Security. I was disappointed when I was advised that I would not be eligible because my 45th birthday was in January and therefore, I had already reached 45 years of age.

I was advised to contact my local member of Parliament with any concerns I had about this matter. Eventually, I was advised to contact the office of Senator Jeannie Ferris as it was a Federal issue. After submitting a letter (copy enclosed), I was advised that they had written to the Minister for Community Services, The Hon Warren Truss MP and I would receive an answer as soon as possible. Senator Ferris and her staff have been very helpful and have acted upon my letter in a reasonable time and professional manner.

I have also enclosed a copy of my resume that outlines my personal and work history and a copy of a concept that looks at enhancing the "Work for the Dole" scheme.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit this information for your perusal and look forward to your comments. I would be happy to meet with you and talk in person when you are in Adelaide.

Yours sincerely

### **Community Officer Concept**

#### **Brief History**

There are many Job-seekers who through age, length of time in the system and lack of positions available face an on-going problem of ever finding work. During this time they face social, financial and emotional turmoil that effect families and the wider community. Some people will never work in the traditional sense which is a major problem for those people and society.

It is difficult for many Job-seekers (especially, long-term and over 40's) in social situations or when applying for jobs when you are asked about your present work status. The Community Officer concept would give jobseekers an option other than replying with - "I'm unemployed", "I'm on Newstart" or "Working for the Dole" (The best option). Job-seekers would be able to show that they

are presently employed in a worthwhile scheme. A job applicant would be able to refer to themselves as Community Officers on their applications.

A considerable amount of money is spent by State and Federal Governments on assisting people and families once problems have reached a crisis point. This concept attempts to reduce the need for these services.

There are increasing costs to governments and the community as the result of crimes like vandalism, graffiti and home invasions. Councils are continually reducing services to people in their areas because of the increasing costs to provide services to their constituents. These are some of the areas of concern that this concept attempts to address.

### **Brief Concept**

Jobseekers (especially, long-term and over 40's) would be asked to apply for positions as Community Officers through Job Agencies, Centrelink, and Councils etc.

Councils would be asked to highlight jobs they would like to fill if they had access to the people. It could be Community Safety and Security, assisting the elderly and disabled, reporting and cleaning up after graffiti and vandal attacks or other council projects.

There may be a community group that requires certain skills and cannot afford to employ a suitable person. A suitable Community Officer would be chosen and given that group as a work project.

I have Office, Marketing, Desk Top Publishing, and other creative skills that could be utilised by one of these community organisations. It becomes a Win - Win scenario for both parties.

The participants would receive the dole and a bonus of a pre-arranged amount paid by the council or a corporate sponsors. The council could fund the bonus from funds that would be saved by a reduction in graffiti and vandalism through a visible community presence on the streets. A company like Telstra could be approached to provide funding as a project to reduce the amount of damage caused from vandalism. It would also enhance their corporate image of being a caring and community spirited organisation. There would be the opportunity to obtain the naming rights to the new scheme. The participants could be known as "Telstra - Community Officers" or "Optus" or "Holden" etc.

Another benefit for those participating would be the presentation of references from those people who have been assisted by this scheme to be added to their resumes.

Question: **"What do you do for a living?"**

Answer: **"I'm a Telstra - Community Officer with the Charles Sturt Council."**

[Correspondence to Senator Jeannie Ferris not reproduced]