



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT,
EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

**Reference: Issues specific to older workers seeking employment, or
establishing a business, following unemployment**

WEDNESDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER 1999

MELBOURNE

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE
RELATIONS

Wednesday, 8 September 1999

Members: Dr Nelson (*Chair*), Mr Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Dr Emerson, Ms Gambaro, Mrs Gash, Ms Gillard, Mr Katter, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

Members in attendance: Mr Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Ms Gambaro and Dr Nelson

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

Inquire into and report on the social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.

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Committee met at 3.00 p.m.**O'NEILL, Mr Patrick Anthony, Proprietor, AO Career Research Services**

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into mature aged unemployed people and welcome the witnesses and others in attendance. We will be taking evidence this afternoon from a number of private citizens. The purpose of this inquiry is to identify the social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age who are seeking employment or establishing a business following unemployment, and to assess the impact of these issues on the economy. We are keen to explore ways to help individuals as well as to address the loss of skills and experience in organisations. Welcome, Mr O'Neill. In what capacity do you appear before the committee today?

Mr O'Neill—I am currently a customer service officer with the ANZ Bank. My interest in employment issues relates to some 30-odd years of service as a Commonwealth public servant. Much of my latter service was with the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training and Youth Affairs.

CHAIR—I remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House itself. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of the parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public. If at any stage you want to give evidence of a confidential nature, then simply ask us to consider such a request. Can you give us a precis of your submission and then we will go through it.

Mr O'Neill—Firstly, for the information of the committee, some of my background was also as a training officer. I will read three of the broader social needs I see which, in part, come from a training officer's perspective, from someone who is looking for needs.

One of the most critical needs is that in order to increase employability of semi-skilled workers there is a need to provide appropriate intermediate levels of literacy and numeracy education for adults and to link these to competencies in service based industries, especially information technology related products and services. I will cheerfully come back and explain that, if I may.

A second major set of needs is in the area of post-secondary schooling—the options and the training. To materially improve prospects of re-employment, there is a need to provide intensive training in basic levels of knowledge of the labour market, labour market conditions, conditions of structural change and knowledge of job search skills. These skills include forms of personal development and developing broad capabilities of learning how to learn, as well as developing adaptive behaviours and strategies.

A third group I am concerned with are those people who do face the issue of commencing small business. I have expressed the need as follows. There is a need for all of those who wish to consider the option of self-employment to be given valued and valuable training in the assessment of small business risks and opportunity costs, especially with regard to the purchase, commencement, growth and development of new small businesses. With that, I wonder if I could ask Maureen to distribute the paper which I will not read

further. Could I just go to my first paragraph and, firstly, thank the committee formally for the opportunity of appearing here with you.

CHAIR—Is there anything else you wish to say by way of introduction, Tony?

Mr O'Neill—My last three months work dealt with a phone line operation for the Victorian state government in which we probably took over 2,000 calls. I suppose one of my most serious intents of coming to the committee is to say there is an enormous amount of hurt out there. People are hurting very badly in this age group. They have lost their jobs and are feeling quite desperate about their prospects of re-employment.

CHAIR—When I was reading your supplementary submission here, I saw that you had spoken to almost 1,000 middle-aged job seekers. I gather it is probably more than that.

Mr O'Neill—The tally was probably closer to 2,500.

CHAIR—Can you tell us what that program was about, and can you perhaps paint a picture for us of the sorts of problems that people were encountering that made contact with you?

Mr O'Neill—My role was as a call centre operator or customer service operator. The program is still within the carriage of the Victorian government. It offers to provide some \$340 as a form of training subsidy to unemployed workers who have been unemployed for less than 12 months. Its attempt is specifically to try to bridge quite narrow training gaps as defined by an employer. If an employer would say to one or a group of would-be applicants, 'Look, you are this close to the job, but I really would like you to have, for instance, competencies in a computer program such as Quicken,' the program is meant to fill that gap, provided that course could be had within that budget of \$340 at, say, a local TAFE college. That is the Victorian government's commitment. They will meet that cost.

CHAIR—So those who were ringing in were ringing in not only to tell you their stories but to access the \$340?

Mr O'Neill—To access the subsidy.

CHAIR—What sorts of things were people telling you?

Mr O'Neill—How hard it was. The worst cases were when men would literally break down and cry over the phone and express their frustration, their lack of self-worth, the sheer frustration of trying what they saw as everything to get a job and have it all come to nothing.

CHAIR—They were of the view that it was their age that was the main barrier to getting a job?

Mr O'Neill—No. Again multifactoral things were operating. People were aware that their industry had shut down. If you were a shirtmaker in the textile industry in Victoria, it is fairly obvious that your opportunities had just been fairly severely diminished. Certainly

people felt a lack of skills, a lack of knowledge. I have referred in the paper to the fact that some people felt they left school too early, albeit 20 or 30 years ago. People would say there was not enough work. They would say that they did not have enough skills to compete for the work that was available. It is not a single dimensional problem.

CHAIR—Keep in mind that we are the Commonwealth. What would you like to see the Commonwealth government do to specifically assist this group of unemployed people?

Mr O'Neill—At the lowest level I would like to see an easing of the social security alternative arrangements that allow people to pursue other activities than Jobsearch and still be eligible for unemployment benefits.

CHAIR—So voluntary work, education training.

Mr O'Neill—I would obviously have a very particular bias towards people being able to undertake more than, currently I think it is, 15 hours education and training, and still be able to receive their Jobsearch or unemployment benefits.

CHAIR—But that was increased, though, in the last couple of years, wasn't it? I think the activity test was relaxed a bit.

Mr O'Neill—I believe in the workings of the test it has certainly been relaxed.

CHAIR—But we should be going further?

Mr O'Neill—I do believe so.

Ms GAMBARO—I have a few questions. The first one is outplacement services. You spoke of self-esteem issues earlier on. In your opinion do you think there is an inadequacy in the way the outplacement services are offered to employees who receive redundancy payments? Do you think there is an inadequacy in the way that outplacement is handled, and its effect on self-esteem?

Mr O'Neill—From the work that I was doing at that client group that I talked about to Dr Nelson, Ms Gambaro, it is hard to say yes. At its best the function is being performed well by a wide range of groups. At its worst it is probably fairly abysmal. I note with some pleasure that the federal government has moved to do something for the miners who were involved in that close down with an apparent loss of everything. But the simple truth is that people do finish a period of 20, 30, 35 years of work with, in some cases, a few weeks of pay or a few months of pay. I consider myself privileged to have worked for the Commonwealth government and to have left government service with what many people would see as a very, very reasonable settlement. But the results are so broad spectrum.

Ms GAMBARO—But in the majority of cases, perhaps in executive positions, the quality of the outplacement service as compared to someone who is in a lower grade job may be a little bit more intense. The people I have spoken to in my electorate tell me that, even when they are in a higher grade position the level of outplacement service offered—that the company is willing to give them—and what actually happens at that time are totally

different, totally inadequate. Perhaps some of the psychological trauma is not being addressed at that termination time as well. Can I ask you also about the average number of weeks mature age employees stay unemployed. We had a submission from the department the other day that stated that it was 79 weeks. Also, when we were speaking to them, mature age women tend to be employed at a faster rate and their unemployment levels tend to be lower. Can you offer some reasons as to why that occurs and some other opinions as to the length of the time there?

Mr O'Neill—I must confess an admiration for the capabilities and the resilience of many of the ladies I spoke to and they have, dare I say, a higher level of willingness to undertake different forms of training. I am fairly confident that would be borne out by community educators who are running community houses and a fairly wide range of community programs. They can basically attract women to their courses; it is almost the bane of their existence to get men to come down for, for instance, leaving certificate or matriculation subjects or even hobby subjects when they know clearly that the men are literally holed up in the houses within a mile or a couple of miles of the centres. There seems to be a form of cultural cringe that will stop mature age men in Australia coming into the open spotlight of a community education centre, whereas women seem to have no such inhibitions.

Ms GAMBARO—Looking at the Job Network and its capacity to deal with the mature age unemployed person, do you see any benefit in having a separate division or some sort of separate subgroup or centre set up for mature age people that will deal solely with mature age employment issues rather than grouping everyone who is looking for a job in the same sort of homogeneous group?

Mr O'Neill—The form of my paper will indicate that I feel there are at least three groups of folk. There are those people we can call the most disadvantaged and they would include migrant workers, migrant women, people with the lowest levels of formal education and people whose jobs in the lowest levels of manufacturing have gone. They have no choice. If they want to stay in the work force, they have no choice other than to think about retraining. I guess we can only take so many ladies from a shirt production line to put them in a waitress or a cashier function in a supermarket or a restaurant. Quite honestly, some of the women I have spoken to deserve better than this anyway. They have got skills and talents to offer. I think one of our problems is basically to harness those skills, those talents and those energies for the overall good of the country.

Mr BARRESI—In continuation of what Ms Gambaro asked then, you mentioned on page 4 of the supplementary information that you brought today that one of your recommendations is for there to be at least one specialised adult education facility in at least one state—or is that at least one in every state?

Mr O'Neill—At least one state.

Mr BARRESI—One in every state?

Mr O'Neill—I would like to see one in every state, but—

Mr BARRESI—What will this facility do which a TAFE college does not already do?

Mr O'Neill—The best example I could cite would be something like Swinburne Senior Secondary College which, as you may know, is a year 11 and 12 school. It deals with a group of students who are probably the oldest in terms of what our system can legally carry in Victoria in a secondary school situation. Apart from the welfare functions which the staff carry out at Swinburne which are quite unbelievable—they feed up to a third of the students as well as educate them—it is an adult learning environment. I believe that some of the needs are so basic they will need the trappings of a high school system of schooling, not a TAFE system and not a university system.

The alternative to that is people need to be bolstered. Again, if we can talk about the lowest third for just a moment, we are talking about people who have not been in a school situation for 10, 20, 30 or in some cases 40 years, who need tremendous support in study skills to be able to cope with the pace and state of today's subjects.

Mr BARRESI—Can this facility simply be an extension of the existing TAFE facility so it becomes a service within the TAFE system rather than the creation of a brand new stream of education?

Mr O'Neill—It could.

Mr BARRESI—Distance education such as the open learning system is very popular and growing all the time now. I do not mean to be political in this comment, Mr Chairman, but I noticed the other day in the papers that Jeff Kennett was saying that he wants to increase the profile of the University of the Third Age. Would that sort of thing assist or is that not even related to the issues that you are on about?

Mr O'Neill—I think it is not, but with the greatest respect to the University of the Third Age. I think in terms of meeting the contemporary requirements of employers, it would be seen as mickey mouse stuff. I say that with the greatest respect.

Mr BARRESI—I understand that.

Mr O'Neill—If I could cite one example that is reasonably close to home, an annexe of Box Hill TAFE has for a number of years now offered a preparatory course for women in the Women's Centre. It has a brilliant record in getting people—almost exclusively women I believe in this case—returning to the work force and training them for either re-entry to nursing or for entry into some of the medical science related courses. That particular centre has a brilliant record, but it is dealing with groups of 15 or 20 people.

Mr BARRESI—Do we have submissions from Box Hill TAFE? Which group is it, Tony?

Mr O'Neill—It is actually the Women's Centre.

Mr BARRESI—The Women's Centre at Box Hill?

Mr O'Neill—They have this spectacular record in effectively a quickie HSC for women re-entering the work force and upgrading their qualifications. I think they get better than a 90 per cent success rate.

CHAIR—In the previous parliament we did an inquiry into TAFEs and the vocational education and training sector and its articulation to the higher education sector. One of our recommendations amongst many that have been ignored by the government was that TAFEs actually be funded to develop a universal HSC curriculum which would take in not only those kids who find it difficult adapting to a conventional secondary education system but also the mature age re-entry who does not want to go back to Randwick High School to do their HSC.

Mr O'Neill—Could I make a suggestion that there is more than adequate curriculum material available now? Those, for instance, are some notes from the Victoria HSC curriculum. This is the catalogue of the Australian National Training Authority. The range of material is breathtaking. It is so good. I will make that available to the secretary, if I may, just so the titles can be noted and committee members may enjoy a forage through some of that material. The range of what is there is impressive. From the pieces I have been able to see, I would want to argue that it is good. We do not now have to reinvent the wheel. We have to use what we have got.

CHAIR—Sure. One of the other recommendations we had in our report, by the way, which you have referred to in your submission concerns careers guidance. We recommended a universal guidance office as it is of varying quality in the secondary education system. But these days, distinct from perhaps when we were in secondary school, people of all ages need careers guidance and assistance.

Mr BARRESI—Tony, you also make some comments here that we should consider the option of self-employment although you do acknowledge it is not for everybody and there are varying degrees of success. Can you expand on that in particular in relation to the NEIS programs that we currently have? Is that addressing the issue or is it inadequate? What changes would you make to that? Or would you start from scratch with a different form of government assistance?

Mr O'Neill—There is nothing in what I have said, I would hope, that would be critical of the NEIS program.

Mr BARRESI—You can be critical if you want to; it does not matter.

Mr O'Neill—As a former DEETYA employee, I can say it was probably one of our most successful programs at the point of evaluation. The folk who went through to the end of the NEIS program had the longest latency. It was the program that had the smallest number of folk back on the books within, say, 2½ years of completion of that program.

My only criticism of NEIS is that I would like to see more speculative investment capital available to folk who take up the NEIS option. The NEIS participants who I have met are very, very nervous about their businesses because they are very light on when it comes to commencing capital. I think it just adds to some of those propositions that, if the business is

so badly undercapitalised, it probably gets off to a shaky start anyway. But, obviously, the ingenuity of some of our would-be entrepreneurs has taken them over some fairly significant humps.

It is very difficult to think about entering almost any manufacturing situation without access to some manufacturing equipment. We are not big, we are not good, and we are not strong on giving people a corner of the factory, which is almost the archetypical American success story. There a kid has an idea and gets the corner of a garage or the corner of a factory.

That can and does happen in the bush, if I might say so. One of my last wanderings with the CES in Swan Hill was to think about a canoe business in Swan Hill for an unemployed youth group. Just in a matter of days I had been offered the use of a fibreglass sprayer, somebody else had found a mould for these canoes, and the local high school was prepared to lend the intellectual expertise. I would argue there are enormous prospects in the bush for supportive arrangements that would get small businesses up, and not necessarily for just one individual either, there is still room for cooperative action in the bush.

Mr BARRESI—The problem with venture capital is that we could be tempted, as a government, to go down the same path as the old disasters.

Mr O'Neill—The RED scheme was similar. Indeed, I do appreciate the problem.

Mr BARRESI—We have already got schemes in place to assist people to develop business plans, and they can get government assistance for that. We have got NEIS, and we have got business incubators. What else can we do without actually starting up the business and handing over the key ourselves? There is only so far you can go as a government, surely?

Mr O'Neill—My feeling is that we should give people up to 12 months to work out a business plan. We should give them the skills to undertake genuine research to be able to develop the computer skills to run the numbers. I am amazed in some cases when I talk to business people and ask them, 'How did you set up your business plan?' They say, 'Oh, using the jottings on the back of a cigarette packet.' I say, 'Do you mean you spent \$400,000 to buy a furniture factory because it seemed a good idea at the time?' 'Yes,' they say. In such cases I suppose we should not be surprised if that business falls over in 12 months time.

But, as a counterpoint, I was talking to a young CSIRO scientist last night who is about to be retrenched, and she is looking at the small business option. She needs an enormous amount of help and support to get to a stage where that business is a commercial proposition.

Mr BARRESI—Thank you.

Mr BARTLETT—Mr O'Neill, you emphasise education as being the main impediment for mature aged unemployed. Do you come across many people where it is more a matter of discrimination based on a perception of a lack of flexibility and ability to do the work and

that sort of thing? Alternatively, have you come across many mature age unemployed who say that they have presented for a number of jobs but have been told that they are overqualified?

Mr O'Neill—It does happen, but I think one at least has control over that. Personally, as a matter of course, I have stopped putting my age on job applications. Similarly, as an extremely long-term user of educational facilities—from fibreglass courses to computer training—I do not put all those courses on my resume because my interest in fibreglass operations bears no relationship to most jobs that I am interested in.

Mr BARTLETT—You suggest in your submission that schools would be an appropriate place for training people in the skills they are lacking. In your discussions with unemployed people, what sort of response from mature age unemployed do you get to this proposal? Do you have the feeling they are responsive to this, or would they feel somewhat hesitant to be thrown in there with 1,000 adolescents?

Mr O'Neill—There is a desperate fear of being thrown in there, and one can only admire the people who do take the plunge.

Mr BARTLETT—There would be some great benefit for the adolescents.

Mr O'Neill—It really does work both ways. But again, in a country high school such as Swan Hill where you might have about 800 students, one adult there would stick out like a sore thumb.

Mr BARTLETT—Are there any schools where there are programs specifically tailored for mature age students?

Mr O'Neill—Not that I am aware of, with the exception of Swinburne Senior Secondary College here in Melbourne. But I will qualify that. There was a head of information technology studies at the old Dandenong TAFE who would literally take on all comers. If you turned up on the doorstep and said, 'Teach me about computers,' he would offer you at least a sit-in place for the rest of the semester. You could sit in on that class and listen to the teachers. You may or may not choose to sit an examination, but he would say, 'Let me see what you are doing and how you are coping with the studies.' That was wonderful.

There will be individual examples of success stories in individual schools, and I think that is fantastic, but I am not aware of any part of our school system that welcomes students en masse in the way that I envisage. Probably the closest we could get to it in a Victorian context would be the Council of Adult Education.

Mr BARTLETT—Do you think the problem with lack of post-school education is something that needs to be addressed in an educational institution aimed at raising qualifications, be it literacy or numeracy, at post-school level, or do you think the problems are better tackled on the job with specific on-the-job training that is adapted and related to the specific skills needed in a particular workplace environment?

Mr O'Neill—Your latter option, while it is commendable, is too hard.

Mr BARTLETT—Why is that?

Mr O'Neill—In the crudest terms, we are dealing with a proportion of some 700,000-odd people. And even if we cut it in half, the numbers are huge. We are talking about 350,000-odd people facing extremely long durations of unemployment. I cannot begin to think of an institution, short of our army, that might use its trade training skills and facilities to train trade people. I cannot think of an institution that has got that built-in training capacity at the moment. Our banks and insurance companies do already offer excellent in-house training to meet their own needs.

Mr BARTLETT—But is it specific qualifications that are needed or just job related skills that could be picked up at an enterprise level or factory level?

Mr O'Neill—For the group I am perhaps most concerned with, and that is, say, the bottom third, to me they need a general education as a general education they typically forwent 20 years ago when they left school in form 2 or form 3, whatever the case may be. But they have missed out on at least the equivalent of three years of contemporary senior secondary schooling. They know that they are competing in a job market with kids that have got that extra three years of senior secondary with some, one would have to say, highly developed skills. There are some superb skills coming out of our Victorian curriculum.

Mr BARTLETT—Have you had discussions with secondary schools, for instance and, if so, what is the response of principals to this concept of taking on mature age students in moderate numbers?

Mr O'Neill—Across the range of principals I have spoken to there is a reluctance. They could handle the odd one or two, but they are in general terms concerned that a group of adult learners would have some special needs. For instance, if you broaden the group, what do you do with adults at lunch time? What do you do if there are licensed premises across the road?

Mr BARTLETT—Do you make them wear school uniforms, et cetera.

Mr O'Neill—Yes. Principals and teachers I have spoken to really are quite happy with the idea of ones and twos. But ask for an annexe to go into the local high school and they do get worried about it.

CHAIR—So it is certainly more than a funding issue. If they carried a funding voucher with them that was a portable education voucher from either a state and/or a Commonwealth government, the issues are more complex than that. It is about personal relationships with young kids. It is about all sorts of stuff.

Mr O'Neill—I really believe that adult groups need the support and the networking that only an adult group can really give them. They would need teachers attuned and sensitive to that. If I can drop back to Swinburne, the teachers are sensitive to the needs of their student body. This is a set of kids with more problems than we want to think about or raise here.

Mr BARRESI—You referred to the Victorian TAFE virtual campus. What is that? How does it work? Do they charge or is it free? First of all, what is it?

Mr O'Neill—You have got me on a break at the moment because I have seen the web site and the web site is there. It is meant to provide access and an intro into the offerings of the TAFE system. There are certainly subject outlines there. There are contact points with local TAFEs.

Mr BARRESI—So it is a web site with information on courses, but it is not a learning tool in itself?

Mr O'Neill—I am concerned I might be doing it an injustice because I have not seen it in its fullest operation, and I have not looked in the last couple of months.

Mr BARRESI—Do you know what the web site address is?

Mr O'Neill—No.

Mr BARRESI—I will have a look at it when I go home tonight.

Mr O'Neill—I have some material there at home, I am sorry.

Mr BARRESI—You make reference to the Internet and how a lot of the information is already on the Internet, it is just a matter of accessing it. How are people in the age range that we are talking about going to access this? A lot of them probably have a fear of technology. They do not have access to the Internet. How are they going to get access to the Internet? Where is it going to be provided—through Internet kiosks, through the school system, perhaps through some of these government departments that we are setting up around the place with transaction centres? I do not know.

Mr O'Neill—I drew back from a recommendation in the paper to the effect of giving folk a computer. If I may say, though, when the French government was confronted with the problem, they issued every domestic phone user with a phone computer. Now at least in Paris even non-speaking visitors might be a little computer literate, can find their way around their computer based phone directory. Certainly, a vast majority of French households have access to a computer. I have no doubt that they have upgraded from the very humble systems that were attached to the phones in the first instance.

It is too easy to say, 'Give everybody that wants one a computer.' There would be this enormous risk that I think you were suggesting. If the equipment went into a house where it was inappropriate, it would be inappropriate. On the other hand, I have seen the joy of 70-year-olds that have got their IT problems by the scruff of the neck and can't wait to get back on the Net or can't wait to run an applications test to make their program work properly.

Mr BARRESI—The Internet is a great tool for learning—there is no question about that—as is open learning and distance education. But my problem with this as a learning medium is that it is totally dependent on self-motivation. A lot of it is self-paced learning. You have to be highly motivated to get on that screen and work your way through it. There

are some people that it is going to be appropriate for. But there will be a whole lot of others that are going to need that classroom-type environment with someone up the front who is going to take them through the process.

Mr O'Neill—At the crudest, I would suggest it could be a third of our population that need that support and that upholding to get them started. But, no doubt when they get started, there will be no stopping them.

Mr BARRESI—Thank you, Tony.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Mr O'Neill. We appreciate that. Thank you for taking the trouble to provide a submission and for coming to speak to it. If you have any supplementary ideas or comments to make on other submissions, then please feel free to send them forward.

Mr O'Neill—I do hope it helps. I would like to think that in some ways I could represent the aspirations of those hundreds of people I have spoken to. There is a lot of hurt out there.

CHAIR—Yes, we are aware of that.

Mr O'Neill—I have no doubt, as a committee, you will hear your own horror stories.

CHAIR—We may have a few later on. When I saw 'AO Career Services' I thought it was confirming my worst fear and that is that there are people who spend a career trying to get an AO, and that in some way you were helping them.

Mr O'Neill—It does not mean 'adults only.'

CHAIR—No. 'Order of Australia' is what I was thinking about.

[3.43 p.m.]

CLARK, Mr Leo John Gerard (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Clark, for taking the time to come and speak to the inquiry. If you would tell us whatever you would like to tell us, then we will have some discussion about it. We will be finishing in half an hour, at a quarter past four, so feel free to use the time to the best of your ability.

Mr Clark—As per the letter I sent, I have been unemployed for just on three years. I am 51 years old. In the last company I was with, I was there for nine years in a successful capacity in sales. I suppose most of my career has been involved in sales, retail or repping in one way or another.

I never expected to be in the position of looking for a job. When I was first unemployed, I was really quite confident that it would not take me all that long to get something else, but it was not the case. I suppose I was a bit sceptical of people who said, ‘It is your age’—not employers, but friends and other people. But the more it went on, the more certain I became that that was the reason.

The last gentleman made the point that he does not put his age on resumes or applications. I was always of two minds about that. I leave it on, but I can never be sure. My view on that is, if I put it on and get to an interview, at least they are aware of how old I am before they interview me. I do not walk through the door and have them say, ‘Oh, my goodness, I don’t know whether we want this or not.’

There was the intensive training program. I had my own PC, which I do not have any more. Through this and through various jobs that I have had, I have a basic grasp of computers. I upgraded that a bit, but it is hard to do recognised courses in computers when you have not got access to a PC at home for the purpose of practising or familiarisation. That is one point. That was tied up with the 12-months intensive training, but that duly finished and I was told, fairly offhandedly, ‘You can keep looking for a job if you want to.’ I do not think the training was intensive.

CHAIR—This is FLEX 3 from your service provider, is it?

Mr Clark—Yes. That possibly did not achieve a lot.

Mr BARRESI—Are you saying that they were encouraging you not to keep going?

Mr Clark—The 12 months intensive training finished and that was that. The view on that, too, was: what should they do in intensive training; should they upgrade or do something within the field you have been in? I do not know whether retraining for something totally different at 51 is applicable. If you do get some other somewhat formal qualification in another field, you are 51 and have no experience whatsoever in that field. I think you are locked in to the field that you have been in for so long.

CHAIR—You applied for 250 jobs in three years. From those applications, you got 40 interviews.

Mr Clark—I would say about that, yes.

CHAIR—What sorts of things were you selling in your last job?

Mr Clark—The last job involved selling PVC to plumbing outlets—the likes of Reece or those types of stores in irrigation. It was fairly broad.

CHAIR—When you went for the interviews, did they imply in some way that, because of your age, you were not what they were after?

Mr Clark—In some instances, but not all. As I know a lot of people within the industry, I ended up hearing who was employed after the interview. Generally, it was somebody younger, even though in some cases I knew the people who had got the position, they seemed, I do not say, less qualified, but less experienced perhaps. I suppose the other thing was that, living in Ballarat, not a lot of jobs for reps come up. Ninety-nine per cent are Melbourne based. As I said in the submission, I made it quite plain that I was only in a rental situation and quite willing to move.

CHAIR—And do you have a family to support?

Mr Clark—No. I am getting married at the end of October.

CHAIR—Congratulations; that is a bright spot. Were you married at the time you lost your last job?

Mr Clark—No.

CHAIR—Right, so you have not suffered that aspect as a result of this.

Mr Clark—No, not that aspect. As I mentioned, a lot of the interviews were based out of Melbourne. When I was under intensive training they supplied 10c a kilometre. You really had to use your car because most of the positions were in the suburbs. As far as I am aware, now that I am not on intensive training, there is no help for people like myself to come to Melbourne for job interviews. You are possibly \$30 out of pocket per interview by the time you come down and end up having to get a bit of lunch.

CHAIR—From your point of view, what happens now? You have had 12 months of intensive training; they have basically said to you in one form or another you might as well give up.

Mr Clark—That is right.

CHAIR—What do you do? How are you supported? What government program supports you? How do you now eat?

Mr Clark—Only through social security payments.

Mr BARRESI—You have declared yourself bankrupt, is that right?

Mr Clark—Yes. Due to a former personal situation, I did not have much by way of savings when I left work.

CHAIR—But even if you had, you probably would have gone through it now.

Mr Clark—Yes, that is right; it would have gone. I did not want to do it, but when you are at the end of your tether, there is nowhere to go but—

CHAIR—So what social security payment would you be getting now?

Mr Clark—I get rent assistance. I think it is just on \$400 a fortnight.

CHAIR—So that is rent assistance?

Mr Clark—It includes rent assistance.

CHAIR—What is the name of that program that you are getting now?

Mr Clark—Newstart, I think.

CHAIR—I am not trying to pry.

Mr Clark—No, I understand.

CHAIR—If you do not want to answer any of this stuff just say to me, ‘I do not want to answer that.’

Mr BARTLETT—With regard to the travel allowance, are you aware of others in your position who fail to go to interviews because they cannot afford the travel cost?

Mr Clark—No. They will usually find a way, I suppose. Relatives will drive them. I am not aware of there being any help in that field. I suppose most Ballarat people are looking for a job within Ballarat, so it is not applicable to a lot of people.

Mr BARTLETT—What would be the best thing the government could do to help somebody in your situation? Do you think it is really discrimination on the part of the employers or have you just been unlucky in terms of job match and skills?

Mr Clark—No. I think there should be something. If the main place for prospective employment is Melbourne, there should be some form of subsidy for an interview situation from anywhere in the country, whether the interview be in Bendigo or Melbourne. Ninety per cent of reps jobs are out of Melbourne and, in many instances, it does not mean a move to Melbourne. I have worked for several companies and covered state territory whilst living in Ballarat.

It does not necessarily necessitate moving to Melbourne, but I think there should be some help. You may not get to an interview in two months, but then it is possible you will have two or three interviews in a fortnight. Generally, you do not seem to be able to see them all up on the one day, so it becomes quite a costly.

Mr BARTLETT—Did you say that you had 40 interviews?

Mr Clark—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—You indicated earlier that you do state your age on all your applications.

Mr Clark—I do, yes.

Mr BARTLETT—That would suggest that your age is not the barrier to employment in those situations where you were invited in for an interview.

Mr Clark—I am not sure on that: whether they are getting a cross-section or whether they are looking at experience. It is my thought—with not a great deal to back it up, I suppose—that if there is a younger applicant who is as experienced or as qualified as me, they seem to take precedence.

Mr BARTLETT—Would the age of the successful applicant in those jobs that you missed out on indicate that that was the problem?

Mr Clark—Yes, that is what made it difficult. Correct me if I am wrong, but apart from, say, apprenticeships and traineeships, is there any assistance for employers to employ not only older people but anybody—long-term unemployed, if I can put it that way?

CHAIR—No, I do not think so. The only wage subsidy that I think the government has announced is for indigenous employment, but I may be wrong.

Mr Clark—No, I do not think there is. I have made several phone calls about it.

CHAIR—Apparently there is no subsidy in Victoria, but Western Australia does have some kind of subsidy. One of the things we are looking at and recommending to the government is whether there should be some kind of portable wage subsidy for the first few months of employment. In fact I was going to ask you whether anyone had offered you work as a volunteer in their company for a period of time—something like that?

Mr Clark—No, they have not. I think if employers had some incentive, once it started happening it might become a rolling thing.

CHAIR—Sure. We went through the wage subsidy program under the previous government. Whilst some lives were individually assisted, it turned out to be an extremely expensive process which did not actually achieve the sorts of outcomes that I think everybody wanted.

Mr BARRESI—Mr Clark, we heard earlier on about the value of outplacement services. There are certainly a lot of outplacement consultants out there making a bit of a killing when companies retrench, and companies usually use outplacement services as a way of absolving their guilt of retrenchments. In the 250 positions you went for, were you in receipt of any outplacement services?

Mr Clark—No, none at all.

Mr BARRESI—What assistance did you get and who gave that assistance to you when you were in the process of looking for a job after you were first retrenched?

Mr Clark—I did not receive any.

Mr BARRESI—None whatsoever?

Mr Clark—No, it was just up to me.

Mr BARRESI—So the company gave you nothing at all?

Mr Clark—No. The package was all above board and that side of it was all right, but I received a month's notice and that was it. I had to start off by looking at competitor companies that were aware of me and the territories I covered, et cetera. It was just whatever I could do.

Mr BARRESI—Of the 250 jobs, could you just give me an idea of the type of job that you were applying for? What range of services? We hear so many different stories these days about skills shortages in various parts of Victoria and, particularly over summer months, there is a very severe skill shortage in rural Victoria in the picking industry. I am not saying that is where you should go. I am just trying to get a feel for the range of jobs you are applying for.

Mr Clark—Of course, I applied for jobs in the fields I had been in and for other sales jobs. I had been in the heating industry. I applied for anything that pertained to jobs that I had directly done and then, for some time, anything I thought I was capable of doing. I have a hobby—or I did have a hobby—of car restoration and mechanicals, that kind of thing. So I went for some retail positions in that type of thing until, I suppose, I got a bit cynical and decided I had to put in for actual jobs that I had done, because if I applied for something that I thought I could do or was within my capability of doing, there were probably 20 or 30 people that had done exactly that job advertised. It made it a bit hard—you lose faith a bit and think you are really stuck with putting in for what you have done. But I have put in for anything—sales, retail, repping, spare parts within the motor industry—that I have some knowledge of.

Mr BARRESI—Were the jobs that you have applied for, or in particular the interviews that you attended, principally during that period when you were going through the intensive training?

Mr Clark—No, there would not have been much difference. It just depended what jobs came up.

Mr BARRESI—Can you just give me an assessment of your feeling about that training period? Was it adequate? Putting aside, obviously, that there was no job at the end of it—the ultimate outcome is that unless you can get a job, it must be a failure—there are degrees of success. Do you feel in your position that the type of training that was offered was appropriately targeted?

Mr Clark—Not really, no. There was basically nothing offered. Computers were but, as I said, I had a base knowledge of them from my own PC and without one at home it is a bit difficult to maintain something like that. But, by and large, nothing was offered and I would see them probably once in three months, something like that.

Mr BARRESI—Was there resume writing?

Mr Clark—That had been all done.

Mr BARRESI—Interviewing skills?

Mr Clark—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Developing networks in the workplace—were those sorts of things covered?

Mr Clark—No.

Mr BARRESI—Financial planning assistance?

Mr Clark—No, none of that.

Mr BARRESI—Your very last line in your letter mentions that you believe:

Perhaps the Government could look at some form of mentoring assistance program in reverse to encourage employers to take this not so old and valuable national asset back into the work force.

You are not so old and I am sure you are very valuable, but how would you see that mentoring program working? I get a mixed feeling of what you are referring to. Is it mentoring or is it job assistance? There is quite a bit of a mixed message there in that sentence.

Mr Clark—I suppose what I had in mind is some sort of assistance in the field I was in. I suppose to a degree it exists now with company training officers but most companies do not have specific training officers for specific things.

Mr BARRESI—They were retrenched.

Mr Clark—I mean somebody to look after the new reps or, in a retail situation, somebody that has had years of experience in a retail situation.

Mr BARRESI—So you would go into this company almost like an on-site coach of the younger people?

Mr Clark—That is right.

Mr BARRESI—Who would pay your wages?

Mr Clark—I assume it would have to be up to the company with perhaps some sort of assistance. I really do not know.

Mr BARRESI—Okay, so let me get it right. Your premise is that you have this knowledge and experience you have built up over the years; a company could make use of this by bringing you in, being an on-site coach of various skills, whatever it may be and for that the company will pay your wages, subsidised perhaps by the government for a portion of it.

Mr Clark—Even on a part-time basis.

Ms GAMBARO—Mr Clark, that is a very interesting proposition. Can I put something to you that came up at another inquiry that I am on? I am on a banking inquiry at the moment. We had a submission by the Commonwealth Bank. They are doing exactly that. They are using older retired bank officers to conduct seminars for older people where they go out to the community. They are working on a part-time basis. In a number of overseas countries—I think in Germany in particular—when people undertake redundancy they continue working in the work force maybe on a part-time basis. They continue doing that until they eventually retire. Do you see any merit in that?

Mr Clark—Yes, I do—on a part-time basis even for a certain period of the year. If it is a company that is relevant to seasonal sales like irrigation, maybe you could work over the spring and summer months or something like that.

Ms GAMBARO—Just going back to job interviews, do you think the location of where you live is a barrier? You have said to me that you would be willing to relocate. I have just gone through the exercise myself. I had somebody working for me that lived a great distance away from my office. It does become a bit of a drag driving an hour and a half each way. Do you think that employers see that you live at Ballarat and, even though you give them assurances that you are willing to relocate, they play it safe?

Mr Clark—It is a possibility. For example, in this last job that I was with for nine years, when I started there they wanted me to relocate. I said, 'Yes, I will. That is not a problem.' Once I had been there for two or three months, they said, 'Oh no, you are doing fine. We don't see any need for you to relocate.' I thought that possibly would have come up again at least in one or two of the interviews and that in a small percentage even somebody would say, 'All right, we'll take a chance.' While it is a thought, I think it would have come up.

Ms GAMBARO—Sales and repping have changed from when you were a sales rep and you had your portable card system and you went out there and you managed a territory.

Mr Clark—That is right.

Ms GAMBARO—How often does computerisation and computer skills come up in job interviews when you go out to work for large companies?

Mr Clark—At interviews?

Ms GAMBARO—If you are taking up a sales rep position and you need to—

Mr Clark—It did not really come up very much at interviews, surprisingly. I suppose it is accepted or I think it is in my resume that I had a basic knowledge of computers. Whilst companies run different systems, the reps need to be able to get in and pull up a pricing list or a customer database—that type of thing. As far as word processing or typing skills is concerned, that sort of thing was fairly non-applicable.

Mr BARRESI—Just out of interest, Mr Clark, what type of products were you selling? Were they industrial products or consumable products?

Mr Clark—Ultimately, consumer. It was irrigation equipment.

Mr BARRESI—So you were not selling to the retail industry.

Mr Clark—Yes, basically. I was selling to wholesale outlets in a lot of cases like plumbing merchants who then sold on to the plumbing industry in the country.

CHAIR—You mentioned that you had a hobby in car restoration.

Mr Clark—That is right.

CHAIR—Did anyone ever suggest to you that you might consider a start-up business?

Mr Clark—The thought has crossed my mind. I did not know, having listened to the last gentleman, that anything was available there, because some capital is required.

CHAIR—When you were in your intensive job training, they did not say to you, ‘You’ve got a skill in this area; I think there might be a bit of a market for that sort of service.’ No-one suggested that?

Mr Clark—No, it did not come up.

CHAIR—You are not a trained mechanic?

Mr Clark—No. There are a lot of things that are beyond me; it is more of a hobby than anything else.

CHAIR—With respect to volunteering, have you been engaged in volunteer activity over the last three years?

Mr Clark—No, I have not.

CHAIR—Is that not something that you really want to do, or is there no opportunity to do so?

Mr Clark—I feel that it is possibly a time fill-in.

CHAIR—That it fills in time rather than anything else?

Mr Clark—Yes. Between dabbling with cars and that type of thing, time is really not a problem. I have always viewed it as being commendable, but it seems to be a bit of a time fill-in, depending upon what capacity—

CHAIR—I have actually given jobs to people over the years because of their volunteer work. For what it is worth, there are some people who look at that and say, ‘Two days a week doing this; tell us about it.’

Mr BARRESI—I have had someone in my office for the last six months working as a volunteer because she wants to get back into the work force. I would not undersell the concept of volunteerism, Mr Clark. It is not from a time point of view, and I am not saying that you are in this situation, but for someone who has been unemployed for a long period of time—two, three or four years; whatever it may be—the biggest danger is going to be a lack of self-esteem and self-worth. If you are in an activity where you are out there making a contribution, be it in a volunteer capacity, that tends to help, at least in terms of your own psychological wellbeing, so that when you do front up to that interview eventually, you are coming across as a positive individual and you can point to the fact that you are making a contribution through giving your own time. So that is how I would look at volunteerism; not from a point of view of, ‘Let’s do it because I’ve got nothing else to do; it takes me out of the home and I don’t have to watch *Days of our Lives*.’ It is more about personal wellbeing.

Mr Clark—Yes, I understand that.

CHAIR—The chief of staff of a senior government minister started five years ago as a volunteer in the office of one of our colleagues, desperate for some kind of job. Thank you so much, Mr Clark. It is hard enough to come to Melbourne for job interviews, so you deserve a medal for coming down here to talk to a bunch of politicians.

Mr BARRESI—We appreciate your time. Good luck.

CHAIR—We wish you well.

Proceedings suspended from 4.13 p.m. to 4.36 p.m.

McCABE, Mrs Carol, Executive Director, Jobseeking Over Forty Association

CHAIR—Welcome, Mrs McCabe. At this point I must say to you that it is important to understand that these are formal hearings of the parliament and require the same level of respect and adherence to parliamentary standing orders as would the parliament itself. If you say anything that is false, you might be accused of contempt of the parliament. If there is anything that you want said in camera, please let us know and we can arrange for that to occur.

Could you give us now a precis of your submission and then we will discuss it. I understand that you have other pressing engagements, so if you need to finish up, just say, 'I've got to go.'

Mrs McCabe—Thank you, but you will probably have to tell me to stop because this is my favourite subject. Once you start nodding off, I will leave.

I am currently the executive director of the Jobseeking Over Forty Association, an organisation that was incorporated in 1992 in Victoria. I did not want to concentrate on arguing that mature age unemployment exists because it is something we all know about. And once these sorts of inquiries are published, then perhaps those who have not suffered through mature age unemployment will know about it too.

It is something that I have been singularly focused on for many years, having been a mature age job seeker myself in 1990 as a result of the end of a 12-month contract. I will not go into my life story, but I was an ordinary, average sort of performer who found I was unemployed for three years and could not get short-listed to save myself. Over the years of working with JOFA and JOFA clients I have found that is a very common story. Once you fall out of the work force, it is extremely difficult to get back in, for a lot of reasons. I guess other groups that you will be talking with will talk about those other reasons too. I do not particularly want to go into them, unless you ask me questions about them.

Apart from things like workplace situations and employers having diverse work forces and so on, the two areas that are critical for mature age unemployment as an issue are grief management—the loss of self-esteem and getting it all together—and changes in family relationships. They were the two areas that hit home to me.

I had been a single parent for quite some years and I did not know how it impacted on a family, other than how I felt. But in the very early days of JOFA I was asked by what is now called Relationships Australia to address their counsellors. I did not know what to say because I was not a family of two, I was a family of one. Therefore, I went and talked to 20 female partners of JOFA clients and I was shocked at the feedback I got from them.

All but one of the women said that when he got a job again, she would leave. They had got to the stage where they could not stand his despondency. It was always the woman who could not put up with the way the man was not coping with his situation and all that goes with it. For example, being baby boomers there was that feeling of losing the role of breadwinner, having been taught by their fathers that that was the way it was, that you went out and got a job and you supported the kids.

CHAIR—Just interrupting you, you said, ‘When he got a job, she would leave.’ Do you mean leave the marriage?

Mrs McCabe—Yes.

CHAIR—When he got a job?

Mrs McCabe—Yes. They would see the family group through until he was back into the work force, but by then they had had enough. They had seen a side of their partner’s character that they had not seen before, the side showing that he could not face the situation he was in. This was in 1992.

Back then there really were not any strategies for us, other than what I was able to put together for JOFA. At that time we were lucky enough to be funded to run a 12-month program called ‘Future Options’, and that was heavy duty grief management, if I can call it that. I brought in an organisation called the Augustine Centre that ran real grief management courses, conducted by psychologists. They were the most meaningful programs I have ever been associated with. Naturally, that sort of thing is extremely expensive to run.

I found that if people could go through some sort of rationalisation of their situation, then they would make it. They had to understand that it was not a personal affront on their capability, that the situation is quite common, that it was okay to be unhappy about it and okay to grieve about the situation, because it is a terrible loss in one’s life. If you can learn all of that then the next part is not as hard. I know I am talking in generalities, but I am trying to put all of my years of experience into a couple of sentences.

Grief management is an area that needs support. JOFA actually has no funding now. It was not successful in the first tender round and did not apply this time. I am finding that a lot of my time is now being spent on working with groups that do—

Mr BARRESI—The funding you are referring to, what funding is that?

Mrs McCabe—It is federal government funding for Job Network.

Mr BARRESI—Okay, thank you.

Mrs McCabe—We have opted out of state government programs because they were not what we were on about either.

That brings in the other area that I was talking about, which is changes in the family relationship. By some strange quirk of fate, JOFA tended to work with middle-aged, male, white-collar baby boomers for no particular reason other than they came to us, although we certainly worked with blue-collar workers too. And we worked with probably 60 to 70 per cent males as against females.

Males felt so devalued in front of their families. Those stories that you hear, the anecdotes of men going off to the park as in the illustration in *The Full Monty*, actually

exist. Suicides, gambling and alcohol abuse is part of that whole spiral downwards, and how one addresses that is a whole series of other initiatives.

I see the mature age unemployment issue as a personal issue of loss of self-esteem and grief for the loss of the life plan that you had laid out as a teenager and how that impacts on your family. That also impacts on job search strategies. Of the tools that you can learn, like networking and how to write a resume and all of that sort of thing, none of that works if you have not got the other part in place because the other bits are most important for us all for our life management.

I found that getting baby boomers to actually sit down and look me in the eye and answer when I said, 'What do you want to do for the next five years? What do you want to do for the next six months? Let us plan that through,' was the hardest task to get people to do. So things like having mortgages and having kids at high school and university and all of those financial conditions, too, are things that the mature age unemployed face when certainly many of them are unable to access unemployment benefits because of their asset base.

Maureen did ask me to give a fairly to the point summary and introduction, and I am never either of those two things, which is a jolly shame. But I should point out that there is a mistake in there. I put in two figures that are both out of context. They are both DEETYA figures. One is the length of time people are unemployed when they are over 45. I have actually put 87 weeks in one instance and 79 weeks in another. I do apologise for that. This was my Christmas holiday typing and cut and pasting. I cut and pasted the wrong one, but I hope you will accept—

Ms GAMBARO—What is the time again?

Mrs McCabe—I believe it is 89 weeks.

Ms GAMBARO—Thank you.

Mrs McCabe—These were 1994 DEETYA figures, so perhaps they have slightly changed from that again.

CHAIR—I think it is back to 79.

Mrs McCabe—Back to 79?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms GAMBARO—We heard 79 the other day.

Mrs McCabe—It is certainly longer than any other group.

CHAIR—Generally, the unemployment rate in the over 45s is lower than the general unemployment rate, but the long-term unemployment rate is higher.

Mrs McCabe—Yes. However, the unemployment rate is categorised into 45 to 54, 55 to 64 and 65 plus. So, if we look at that whole group, it certainly is not 5.9 per cent. If we also take into account the discouraged job seekers who have sent in 200 applications, never got short listed and said, ‘That is it; I throw up my hands; I am too old,’ I think in fact we would find that there are many hundreds of thousands of mature age unemployed people out there whose skills are being lost to our current work force, which I am sure you know.

Just one other point is that, during that period of 79 weeks, the skills and experience that those unemployed people had tend to go off the boil. The longer it goes—including my three years, mind you—the harder it is to get back into the workplace. So strategies like programs where people can come in for a six-month period and actually work alongside others and add to the workplace in that way, perhaps a work for the dole program that is specifically for mature aged people, and also using mature age people in a mentoring role, are very valuable.

Without going into any more detail, the point that I have wanted to make for many years is that there is an issue out there that is hardly visible. Mature age people—baby boomers—tend to take it on the chin. I am talking in very general terms, but my experience with the thousands that we have worked with in Brisbane, Sydney, the Gold Coast and Melbourne over the years has been that, ‘If this is it, then this is as bad as it gets, and I will go away and deal with it.’ They are certainly not a group that will wave the banner and ask for help.

The issues of grief and depression are very relevant to the solution, whatever the solution may be. I have jotted down a few of my favourite things that I think we ought to go about doing. My solutions on page 16 have been rattling around for an awfully long time, and I am rather pleased that there is now an inquiry into mature age unemployment.

CHAIR—What is the experience that you and your people have had with the way in which employers deal with redundancy and dismissal processes? Are a number of the problems associated with adjusting to being unemployed and career transition actually rooted in the way in which their dismissal has been managed or not managed?

Mrs McCabe—Yes. Probably a good 50 per cent of the group have been put off in the most unceremonious circumstances that I would defy anyone with any sort of sound resolution to be able to cope with. A minute’s notice and a security guard with a cardboard box at your shoulder is not a happy time. It is hard enough to be unable to look forward to more years with the company without having to put up with, ‘Gee, not only am I not good enough to work there, but they’ve frogmarched me out.’ There are stories of people whose company cars have been taken and they are left on the nature strip with a box. It is very, very common.

When I linked up with the group that the European Union runs, the first year that I went there, in 1995, I went as a guest speaker, and I rabbited on for quite a long time. I think they enjoyed my accent and they allowed me to continue talking. When we got down to working groups, it was interesting that those issues of grief and self-esteem did not exist over there; they were not real, important issues. Their issues were more about generating employment possibilities and more economic strategies.

I suppose over the years, going back to those conferences, it seems to me that it is more to do with our dismissal processes. In Europe, in very general terms, it seems that people are more comfortable with the knowledge that they are doing to downsize—their workplace is going to put them on to half-time or three days a week, or you go in and mentor a new trainee. All of that seems to be in place in many countries, particularly the Scandinavian countries, whereas here it is something that is hardly being implemented.

So with respect to that transition phase that you talk about, they have done a lot of work on retirement and transition to retirement which seems not necessarily to be the case so much here. I know there is work being done on retirement issues but it still does not seem to be nipping it in the bud.

CHAIR—If we were the representatives of the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to whom we will be speaking, what would you say to them—and a lot of the time the companies themselves are in trouble—about how, in an ideal world, this process should be handled?

Mrs McCabe—In an ideal world, I think what is happening in some European countries—I think Norway has a two per cent unemployment rate—is that managing the career is part of the ongoing work process right from the start, so that all the way through you have some kind of mind map of where you are going. It may or may not be with that same company. The retirement part of the phase is quite well linked with the work part. If you were the Business Council, I guess I would point out that you are losing valuable resources by just cutting people off and turfing them out at 50, whereas, as we all live longer, there is another 20 or 25 years worth of experience that can be used. I would love to know the dollar value of what that skills loss is. I believe there is some research being done in Canberra on that at the moment. Maybe it is going to be done or maybe it has been done; I am not sure.

But certainly, in having a diverse work force, the downsizing of the late eighties and early nineties led to work forces that do not have corporate memory, for example, because all of the older experienced staff have gone.

Mr BARTLETT—This idea—and I found it very interesting in your submission—of a movement to part-time work in those later years, have you pursued that with any individual employers or employer organisations, and, if so, what sort of response have you had?

Mrs McCabe—Might I say that in 1992, 1993 and 1994, when I started working with people on a voluntary basis in 1992 with Rotary, the notion of working part time was not even able to be flagged. No-one was interested in talking with me about a part-time job—it just was not on. So we had to separate all the sorts of careers that might have had part-time components because no-one, absolutely not one soul, wanted a part-time or a casual job because that meant that you were basically saying, ‘All right, I am only good enough for a part-time job.’ Since 1994 there has been quite a change in the climate and in the acceptance of part-time and casual work, contract employment, so a lot of our people went off into three-month contracts or 12-month contracts which in 1992 they would not have looked at.

Mr BARTLETT—So the problem was really from the—

Mrs McCabe—It is an attitudinal and a learning problem, I believe.

Mr BARTLETT—With the employee rather than the employer?

Mrs McCabe—The employee. We had a lot of employers who were linked with us over the years and stuck with us because mature age people, once they get back into the work force, basically stay there, so that you have a nice workplace if you have been able to put yourself out to take mature age people. But organisations like call centres or research organisations and security companies that I was able to talk to had traditionally had a huge turnover, a very high turnover, because they were casual jobs. They were the sorts of jobs that traditionally you took when you were looking for a job. They were things that filled in and kept the money coming in but you really would never have done them to be serious about a career.

With the security division particularly—and you will notice even now in retail stores most of their security guards are older men—they found, anecdotally on my part, that mature age workers actually stopped that huge turnover that they have had. In 1994 we had a security company that we used to work with providing people who fed back to me that information, that it had basically reversed the turnover rate, and so they saved a lot of money because they did not have to retrain new staff as they turned over every couple of weeks.

Mr BARTLETT—So these are employers willing to take on mature age part-time workers. But what about the response of employers with an ongoing work force moving their employees from full time to part time as their employees approach retirement age—say, from 50 onwards?

Mrs McCabe—I do not have any feedback on that. It is probably something that I wish would happen.

Mr BARTLETT—And I note in your submission examples of how that works in other countries and the sorts of incentives that are in place, or mechanisms in place to facilitate that.

Mrs McCabe—Yes. I think the reality is that incentives are probably necessary to start with. I am not sure. I did some work with VicHealth not that long ago with HR managers and they were looking quite glassy-eyed at the thought of staged phasing out of older workers.

Mr BARRESI—We had a submission on that the other day. Someone spoke about the European experience and actually said that it was not working.

Mr BARTLETT—Is that right?

Mr BARRESI—Yes, they said it has actually been a failure because it was used as a fast track to get them out.

Mrs McCabe—I do not know that we can say that about the European experience in that way, though, because each country's program is different.

Mr BARRESI—I was saying the French system was probably the best, and even that was considered not to be successful.

Mrs McCabe—I do not know that that is correct, to be honest. I think the German system is working and, certainly, Norway is, and I would have to go back to my notes to have a look at the rest.

CHAIR—I come back to the women who say, 'I will leave him when he gets a job,' and this whole idea of how we manage redundancy and dismissal. I have a medical background and I worked in an area of the second-poorest SES in the country—in fact, for a decade—and frequently the first that I would find out that a person had lost his job, usually, was a couple of months after the event when you have a child with bed-wetting, or you have fairly serious depression in a wife, or there would be some sort of emotional and/or physical abuse. I often thought—in fact I tried unsuccessfully to persuade the previous federal government—that we should start looking at the way in which the whole process is dealt with.

In an ideal situation, it seemed to me that the employee's wife, or husband, or partner should be notified; there should be a counselling session arranged which involved the notification of the family doctor, which brings in the financial counsellor and adviser, which brings in a person from social security services. This is the ideal kind of thing so that when the major life event is actually occurring you have got people on the ground floor at the time, so you are not just having the gates closed and the employee sent to the wall with the last pay packet. Not that that solves the problem, but my experience has been that a lot of the problems with a sense of loss of self-worth and all that sort of thing actually relate to the way in which it all happens.

You have talked about mature age centres. Is there some way in which this could be dealt with? I think there ought to be a code, for example, at least agreed to by the major industry and employer organisations in our country that this is the ideal model in which this is dealt with. Have you given thought to that?

Mrs McCabe—The mature age centres, I guess, are a compilation of all of that. Along with the self-esteem and grief, and the implications for the family, is the dilemma that—and I am talking about the male again, but that is our experience mostly with the male white-collar workers—there can be a really long period of time where they are so angry or they are still in that stage of disbelief that many men have said to me, 'I can't go out because I am thinking they might review it and call me back,' or, 'I can't come in because I am waiting till the network gets back together again.' They can wait for a year, or they can accept that this is what has happened but then go through this. I am not a medical person, so I am just sounding like I know what I am talking about with stages of grief, but these are stages that appear to me. The anger is extraordinary. Some people carry that anger with them for years. So I really believe that that is tied up with often not being successful at interview, even though perhaps they are short-listed and they do not pick up the job because, I would think, it is very difficult to be so angry and full of hate for the company that has put you on the nature strip to be able to present yourself to a new, prospective employer. That is a really serious issue.

I have had clients up until last year. One fellow who was 39 had been put off from a very large multinational company and was very, very angry and unaccepting of it. I was able to find him a 12-month contract at \$100,000—you see, the money is irrelevant; a \$100,000 contract—but he would not take it because he wanted to get the others back. That is not an isolated incident. Some version of that is quite common.

The anger often tends to be covered up with heavy drinking. So people come to sessions and they are still full from the night before, from the early morning or whatever. I do not think drugs are a huge problem with the baby boomer group, because we are not very practised at that sort of thing. Certainly alcohol abuse is a major problem. It is really difficult to work with people who cannot take the next step because they are down at that very base level of resignation. The longer they are in that angry disbelief phase—with the family breaking down around them and all that self-esteem issue and stuff with it—the less chance they have got even after 79 weeks of ever getting another job. These are people from all walks of life: CEOs, general managers and factory supervisors. They are people who have had a whole lot of experience. The bottom line is that they feel they have been let down by society, so they blame the company and then they blame everyone else.

Ms GAMBARO—To extend this relationship situation, in situations where there has been difficulty in a marriage before the breakup, does it intensify if there has been a job loss?

Mrs McCabe—I am guessing. Of the 20, one said, ‘I’ll stick by him and we’ll see it through.’ Obviously, they had a very good relationship.

Ms GAMBARO—That does not say much, does it?

Mrs McCabe—Maybe 19 of the 20 I chose had rocky relationships. I really do not know that. But when I delivered my very first public speaking engagement to Relationships Australia many years ago, they were just starting to see that tip of the iceberg in family breakdowns. Up until then, they had not thought family breakdowns were related to unemployment. When they learned of my experiences, they could see that there was some sort of correlation.

Ms GAMBARO—In a situation where a male mature age person has been unemployed for a long time and a decision is made for the partner—the wife, in this case—to go back to work because there may be greater employability and the mature age previously employed husband has to take on domestic duties and reverse roles, what are the coping mechanisms there and what difficulties does that also place on the change in the relationship?

Mrs McCabe—I actually do not think reversing roles helps. I think that is seen as being demeaning. We did a story last year. Perhaps I should have brought my tape in; that would have been sensible. Three of our clients were interviewed last year for the *7.30 Report*. Two of them were in the middle of a dreadful family situation. One was reversing roles and one’s wife had left with three children. He was basically at the point of taking his own life.

The one who was in the reverse roles was a psychologist. He had been in the education sector. We all had tears in our eyes when he told his story, including the journalist, the

cameraman and soundman. It was very sad and very telling to hear his story about how he loved his kids, loved being home and really enjoyed all of that, but the bottom line was that he did not feel like he was a man any longer.

CHAIR—Was the *7.30 Report* screened?

Mrs McCabe—Yes, it was.

CHAIR—Do you remember roughly when that was screened, Carol? Could you take that on notice and direct us even to the month that it might have been screened and we will get hold of it.

Mrs McCabe—Yes. There were two sessions. I think the first one was in October of last year and the second one was a follow-up with the minister and I have a feeling that was in December.

CHAIR—When we launch our report, it would be very nice to play something like that.

Mrs McCabe—I will call Maureen when I have the information.

Ms GAMBARO—Society does ostracise men in that situation, just as it ostracised working women when they went out to work. I want to ask you about part-time work. You said that, not so long ago in 1992, there was a reluctance by employers and employees to take on part-time work. I remember reading a book about 10 years ago by Charles Handy, *The Age of Unreason*. It was pretty revolutionary then. It went on about the core activities of organisations, that an organisation was like a shamrock and that, by the turn of the shamrock leaf and by the turn of the century, more people would be in part-time work and leisure would take over. Companies would just hang on to core activities and outsource their non-core activities. In your opinion, has outsourcing provided, or do you think it will provide, more job opportunities for mature age employment?

Mrs McCabe—These are wonderful questions and I appreciate being able to answer them. Outsourcing ought to be the panacea. There are many consultants out there in my experience who are absolutely unemployed and always will be because they do not know how to do it. And it is all very well to go off and say, 'I am going to be a consultant.' The lucky ones go off and pick up a job—a contract from where they were previously working.

When I was chair of JobsEast mature age unemployment working group, we started a research project into consultancy in the east. I do not know whether you are allowed to start research programs knowing what you want to find out in the end, but that was what we were doing. I had a feeling, from my experience with people who call themselves consultants, that they were in fact unemployed. I would be very surprised if that was not the case. There is a gap in knowledge and know-how. People who have made a choice, or who have been guided into being consultants, have to know how to sell their skills to pick up that outsource work. There are many who have been very successful at it, but there are certainly many more who would not have had a contract in many years.

Ms GAMBARO—Job sharing is something that I have been pushing for quite a number of years. From my own experience of the personnel industry, when we advertised for part-time work—and usually they were administrative, clerical or sales types of positions—we would be inundated. The mailman did not just deliver it by hand. He brought whopping big bags of letters from people who were applying for these positions—hundreds of positions, hundreds of applications for a part-time job.

I looked at it in the context of women with young children having families. In the context of mature age employment, if we encouraged employers to look at job sharing in the workplace not only in relation to women but in relation to a whole series of employees, particularly mature age ones, do you think that could overcome some of the problems as well? For instance, if you have two people trained for the job, if one person goes on holidays, the other person will have the skills to take over. Do you think there would be a resistance particularly for male members of the work force?

Mrs McCabe—I think there might be resistance from the males for the same reason there was resistance to other forms of work. Certainly it is another option, but it is not an option if you want a full-time job or if you have got so much debt that you have to have a full-time job to be able to service that.

Ms GAMBARO—But it might be an issue when a person has gone through the rearing stage, paid off the mortgage and is in that 55-plus age group perhaps?

Mrs McCabe—To be honest, I do not know how many of us in the 50-plus age group have paid off the mortgage. There are some who have, but I think a darned sight more of us have not, and the banks keep giving us more. I think that is another whole issue but, as a baby boomer, one does not say, 'I am in debt and I am having trouble here and I need some help.'

Ms GAMBARO—I am conscious of hogging other people's time. If we have time, I would like to ask you another question.

CHAIR—Okay.

Ms GAMBARO—I want to ask about the franchising industry. I have seen a number of people who have become redundant rush out to the nearest franchise—I had to be on the receiving end of that sometimes—with \$400,000 or \$200,000. They had been retrenched and they wanted to buy a business. They rush out there and invest in an ice-cream shop, for example, or something, with no experience. They have worked in the public sector or whatever. What has been your experience of people who have been with companies for 30 or 40 years and then branch out into franchising? Do they generally make a fist of it or is it fraught with danger?

Mrs McCabe—My guess is it is fraught with danger. I think some people are successful because they have the personalities that will be successful. Certainly, with the bottom end of the franchises like mowing rounds they do not have sales skills and networking skills. In my street there are three different mowers there who are not the big franchises. They have never come to me and said, 'Would you like me to mow your lawn for nothing this week and I'll

do it for \$20 a fortnight.' No-one has ever said that to me. Having worked in real estate for a few years, I picked up some good selling skills, or some good communication skills, I should say, with all respect to the real estate industry. Why has nobody ever come to me to say that? Why does the person who is trying to sell the direct mail stuff drop the thing at my door and is never seen? Why doesn't he or she come back when I am there. They do not have that basic bottom line of being able to communicate with people.

When I talk to mature age unemployed people in groups, I talk to them about networking and they look at me oddly. I say, 'Don't get the weekly papers; don't get Saturday's *Age* or the *Sydney Morning Herald* or any of those because the jobs in there are not the jobs for you. They are the jobs for people who have already got jobs.' Why on earth the bank counts them up, I have got no idea. I never will understand that. I suppose maybe banks love to count; I am not sure. But I do not see any relevance between how many jobs there are advertised and how many unemployed people are there to be able to take them up, because by and large, they will not be filled in my experience by people who are unemployed. I try to teach them some elements of communication skills and thinking about, 'All right, now all of you people are possible networks for me. If I'm at the pub, all of you people are possible networks for me.' You have got to learn to be able to talk to people out there in a selling capacity as a franchiser or as an ice-cream shop owner. You have got to learn to be able to research.

If you have been a public servant for 30 years and you still wear a cardigan or safari suits and sandals you have to change. If you have got an out-of-date hairstyle you have to change and have a No. 2 haircut. Honestly, I have got really good at dealing with men who have got out-of-date hairstyles. It used to embarrass me to start with, but you need to have at least a No. 4, if not a No. 1, because that is how it is. You want to be part of the mainstream and you must look it. The ladies wearing the wrong colours, wearing navy stockings with suits or whatever is not currently fashionable or wearing the wrong colour lipstick have to adjust. You are not the public servant any more; you are the ice-cream vendor or the lawn mowing person or whatever. If you cannot adjust to that, you need to be taught because unless you are really clever, you will never know.

I used to bring in a guy who was terribly confronting. I used to cringe after he had done sessions because I thought there would be more lawsuits than you could poke a stick at. He said to people, 'That suit is awful; you just look awful. Pinstripe suits are not right any more. If you come in a pinstripe suit go and get another one'—that sort of thing—'That hairdo—you do not have to brush over; go and get a No. 1.' If you are bald, you are bald, that is it. But people do not see it. We do not see what we look like and we do not see how we appear to other people. I am getting off the track, but all of that is part of being able to go out and be part of the service industry.

Ms GAMBARO—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—I think I will dash out and get a new suit of clothes.

Mrs McCabe—I have not got my glasses on. I cannot see if they are pinstriped.

Mr BARRESI—I would say, Carol, your answer then is probably the reason why the lawnmowing guy up the road probably will not come and mow your lawn. He probably thinks you are going to tell him exactly what he should be wearing.

Mrs McCabe—I do not care what they have got on. I would just love someone to come and do it.

Mr BARRESI—Can I just continue on that theme of the franchises? Is that all right?

CHAIR—I thought you were going to continue with the theme of hairstyles and cardigans.

Mr BARRESI—No, my hairstyle is fine. You spoke about some of the problems. Would you say that the proliferation of franchising at the moment in Australia really is targeting those over 40 who have been retrenched? Is it a deliberate strategy to target that group that is taking place? Should we be helping it out, particularly with perhaps changing our NEIS guidelines?

Mrs McCabe—I think the dilemma for people who choose to go into franchises is that they are very attractive and it is really hard if you are starting from a base of no knowledge to be able to filter your way through all of the different sorts of franchises because, obviously, they all sell themselves as the best one to go into. With regard to NEIS programs and also the Job Network, I think that with the current programs that we have and certainly the state government program, it is not in their interests to give advice on those other sorts of activities that are really ancillary activities. I would think that probably there would be little or no advice for being able to take up a franchise with a degree of confidence and also to have the training that is necessary. Probably where mature age centres come back to is handling the hard stuff like the grief management, counselling, consulting and that sort of thing.

Mr BARRESI—We had a witness earlier on today talk about the creation of centres where people could go back to in order to develop the learning skills to get back into the work force. Can you see that perhaps our TAFE systems or the CAE can be adapted to handle this or not?

Mrs McCabe—Do you know what I think? I think that learning new skills is irrelevant and that is probably not what the mainstream managers of mature age unemployed would think. I think it is actually quite easy. The hard part is finding someone who will take you on, and my experience has been that—

CHAIR—When you say it is irrelevant, do you mean it is important to get new skills but it is not the actual barrier to getting another job?

Mrs McCabe—No, I do not think either of those.

CHAIR—Hang on, I just want to be clear about that. Are you saying that getting new skills is not important?

Mrs McCabe—Getting new skills may not be of any relevance to the job that you get, so that you might not need new skills.

CHAIR—I can accept that.

Mrs McCabe—You can go off and get new skills and still have all of those barriers that are preventing you from getting a job.

CHAIR—Sure, but as a prospective employer, as I and certainly my colleagues have been, the fact that someone has been prepared to go out and learn something new is impressive, even if they do not need those skills for the job that you are offering.

Mrs McCabe—Sure, but, conversely, my experience has been that employers have said—and this was probably back when taking on new employees was fraught with more difficulty than perhaps it is now, I am not sure—that they were looking for someone who fitted into the group and someone who fitted into the workplace and they would train them after. That might not be what employers are saying to you but that is certainly the reason that I push the networking barrow. I believe that, if you can find someone who you relate well to, they may well take you on.

My computer skills are pretty ordinary, but if you think I have got other very good skills you may be able to use, you will probably not worry about the fact that I cannot get into Lotus or whatever you do with Lotus. I can do Lotus after. But if, not knowing what you are looking for, I go out and learn all of the other things and not Lotus anyway, I still have not got the job. You will never have met me because the network will have gone and you will have missed me as a potential employee. Does that explain it?

Mr BARRESI—Going back to my original question though, where do you see these centres being established? Can they be incorporated in a current CAE structure or TAFE structure?

Mrs McCabe—If this sort of thing was part of the TAFE structure it becomes a little bit too regimented possibly. I have found it is very difficult to get mature age unemployed people to be part of this system. Maybe the system in New South Wales with the mature age centres that I have long admired with regional centres is possibly a way to do it as a stand-alone entity.

Mr BARRESI—Do we go and see a mature age centre in New South Wales? You would recommend that, would you, Carol?

Mrs McCabe—I would certainly recommend that.

Mr BARRESI—We are going off to JobsEast tomorrow to have a chat to Louise and her people. You mentioned quite a bit about part-time employment. I noticed the statistics that Australia's part-time work as a proportion of the total work population is quite comparable with those of other nations, with the exception of the Netherlands which is at 36 per cent. It is 25 per cent part-time work as a proportion of total work population. We are up to that already. What do we need to do, given the current Australian industrial, political and

legal systems, in order to move towards a German type model and is it possible? You are saying the German model is one of the better models that you have seen. What do we need to do to get to that stage? Will it succeed here as well?

Mrs McCabe—I think it has got to be a bipartisan, pro-union, all encompassing movement. I think the metalworkers' union maybe a decade ago was starting to look at those sorts of issues—back when I was at uni doing some study.

Mr BARRESI—Do we start off with changing the pro rata pay as they did by 20 per cent and then you pay pension contributions at 90 per cent? Would that be the way to start it off?

Mrs McCabe—The problem is that nobody ever thinks they are going to be unemployed.

Mr BARRESI—We do—all the time.

Mrs McCabe—Other than members of parliament and journalists. I am generalising again, as I sometimes tend to do, but I think the bulk of the population thinks that unemployed people are other people who are not competent and that they will never be in that situation, which is probably part of that continuum, and when they do in fact become unemployed they become one of them. I think it is a terrific idea but I do not know how you would get people to pay that sort of contribution.

Mr BARRESI—By the way, Teresa and I actually spent time with the Geneva Association earlier this year, so some of this information you have here from the *Les Quatre Piliers*—

Mrs McCabe—You met Genevieve Redev-Mulvay?

Mr BARRESI—Yes, we had a great discussion with Genevieve and we will be making that available to the committee—as I remind myself to do all the time.

CHAIR—Carol, thank you so much for taking the time to come and do this.

Mrs McCabe—My pleasure.

CHAIR—Good luck with your other endeavours. If you see other submissions or you have any supplementary ideas or anything you want to comment upon please feel free to send it through to us and it will be well received. And could you give us some general indication of when the *7.30 Report* may have run that story?

Mrs McCabe—I will do that.

CHAIR—We will track that down as well through our library processes.

Mrs McCabe—The other thing—just in closing; I do not know if I am supposed to close—I am currently doing is that I have set up a small business incubator industry-specific

for the fashion and design industry. That is obviously another area of mentoring people through their small business which is how you manage franchising and that sort of thing too.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Barresi**):

That the committee receive as evidence and authorise the publication of the supplementary submission received by Mr Tony O'Neill for the inquiry into issues specific to workers over 45.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Bartlett**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at the public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 5.31 p.m.

