

EASTCOAST

Training & Employment

Ref. EXE 3/10/1

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Workplace Relations
Suite R 1 116 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

15 April 1999

SUBMISSION - INQUIRY INTO ISSUES SPECIFIC TO WORKERS OVER 45 YEARS OF AGE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT, OR ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS, FOLLOWING UNEMPLOYMENT

Background

My name is Alan J. Sparks, I am 49 years of age and after 26+ years with the Army accepted a redundancy package and left the service. In a very short period of time, I experienced some of the direct effects of being unemployed and over 45 years of age. In my own case however, I had a number of advantages over others in this category including that I:

- received a redundancy package
- was entitled to Out-placement Training
- received an element of paid re-training
- found employment within three months

It is noteworthy that my new employment is Chief Executive Officer of a community based, not-for-profit organisation providing services for the unemployed. It is based on my personal experiences and observations as CEO that I offer this submission.

Situation

While there is justifiably a focus on unemployment in our youth, a major group of unemployed remains those over 45 years of age. This number is likely to increase in the next five to ten years as the demographic aging cycle continues. It is also a by-product of the accelerating trend to restructure businesses with the older staff of middle management often the casualty of this process.

For those who find themselves displaced from the workforce after a long time of regular employment, the psychological impact can be severe. Compounding this period of upheaval is the economic uncertainties of middle age when we are often committed to a mortgage and consciously or sub-consciously looking forward to greater financial stability with children less dependent and

lifestyle-demands diminishing. The opportunities for re-employment can appear limited and the competition of younger applicants often unsettling. In many cases, people in this predicament may lower their ambitions attempting to quickly reestablish security in their lives. This short-term solution may simply generate more dissatisfaction and yet another round of job displacement.

A sound strategy of psychological support and appropriate job search technique can be offered by qualified agencies. This level of support varies in intensity and should be personalised and individualised. The success of such a program is dependent on appropriate Government policies, public and employer support and individual commitment. Funding requirements extend to the provision of this professional support and the maintenance of essential living standards until employment is secured.

This special category of unemployed has much to offer employers. They are often highly motivated, have sound work ethics and team skills and are versatile and generally resilient in the workplace. They are however, most vulnerable to the state of unemployment and this can manifest itself in a severe process of grieving in the period following displacement.

Aim

The aim of a formal program of relief should be to strengthen the resolve in the individual and to heighten the awareness of the skills and talents transferable to both the person concerned and to prospective employers.

A Role for Community-based Organisations

There is a major role for community based organisations who can offer the personalised and individualised services. They can provide this vital contribution without magnifying further feelings of displacement because the help offered is local. Efforts to secure work can have a significant palliative effect if commenced as quickly as possible. Regular contact with a community agency can be simplified and a feeling of genuine help can be exploited and encouraged. (The further one has to travel to seek support the more alienation the effect.)

In some cases, a community organisation can more easily recruit staff who have experienced or empathise with local industries and/or commercial enterprise requirements. (My own circumstance as an ex-member of the Defence Force is a case at point.)

Program Initiatives

East Coast Training and Employment has undertaken a number of initiatives to tackle this growing problem. Last year as a community service, we offered support to the very group this Inquiry is considering. This year, we have received Government funding under the Community Employment Assistance Program (CEAP) to fund this service over a twelve-month period. Our program will target people over the age of 40. Our experience and data collection will grow with this program. Results would be available to Government in due course.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee consider the important role played by community organisations involved in the provision of unemployment services. In some cases, additional infrastructure expansion grants would assist the expansion of these services.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan J Sparks', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

ALAN J SPARKS
CEO