

Mr Paul McMahon
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Workplace Relations
Suite R1 116 Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr McMahon

Thankyou for your letter of March 22 1999 requesting a submission from the Wheatbelt Area Consultative Committee Inc on the social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.

A meeting of WA Wheatbelt Job Network members and Wheatbelt Employer Service Providers was held on April 13 1999. The following submission is based on discussion at that meeting and further research by the Wheatbelt ACC Inc.

The main concerns

Group discussion discovered the main concerns for workers over 45 years of age were social issues.

There is a perception by employers that mature age people are out of work because they are either lazy or responsible for the situation, only skilled in one area from a long term job which they were recently made redundant from, or over qualified.

In small country towns mature age unemployed people are often ostracised by community groups such as the local sporting and service clubs.

Breakdown

There are two types of unemployed over 45 year olds-those who want to work and those who don't want to work.

1) *Those who want to work and the problems they face*

- a) Many have no work preparation skills, such as writing resumes, attending interviews etc (many have had only one job since they left school);
- b) Employers have a perception they are too old and/or not attractive enough, especially in hospitality fields of work;
- c) They have only been trained in one area and these skills are not transportable;
- d) Perception of employers that older people are harder to train and out of touch with the new ways;
- e) Once they have been unemployed for three months or longer, employers believe there is a reason for them not being able to find work and this is the reason they are not even interviewed for some positions;
- f) Believe a man is what his job is. If he can't find a job, he is a failure;
- g) Many do not have the money to spend on re-training themselves;
- h) Females will often accept any job whereas males will not;
- i) Many are seen as threats to the authority of younger managers;

j) Do not have tertiary qualifications and many jobs now require these;

2) Those who don't want to work and reasons why

- a) Some have psychological problems;
- b) Some have a physical inability to handle manual labour;
- c) Some believe they have paid their taxes for 35-40 years and shouldn't have to go back to work, they should be supported;
- d) Some have been offered redundancy and believe this will support them until their superannuation kicks in;
- e) Some don't want the stress of trying to find work later in life;
- f) Many believe they are incapable of re-training in an every changing world, especially with rapid technological changes;

How do we help those who want to work?

- 1) Promote mature age apprenticeships with a higher wage for an older apprentice subsidised by a government scheme.
Positive reasons for employing a mature age apprentice
 - a) will stay longer than young person, 60% more stable;
 - b) if has a family, will be loyal to job;
 - c) can put on a relative;
 - d) Better social skills than younger people.
- 2) Package a mature apprenticeship as a part time apprenticeship with the rest of the time devoted to a small business course.
Many NEIS participants have opened a business through the NEIS program and then applied for and obtained a full time job where they can earn more money. This was mainly because their new employer saw them as proactive in running their own business, rather than another unemployed mature age person seeking work.
The Government needs to resurrect the perception of what is an unemployed person.
- 3) Get to them before they are out of work for three months or more. Get The unemployed into an Intensive Assistance program. Employment National representatives at the April 13 meeting said 50 per cent of people Who did the Intensive Assistance program, found a job within six months.
- 4) The Government pays the fee to retrain these people, especially those who have been made redundant. The Government has the option to pay social security to these people for the rest of their lives or pay for retraining and get them to start a business themselves and/or get a job and pay taxes.
- 5) Encourage people whose positions are being downsized, outsourced or redeployed to tell their employer to find them another job and not accept redundancy.
- 6) Get them into NEIS schemes if there is a need for more businesses in the area they live in. In the past 18 months, 80 per cent of NEIS projects have come about because people have had their jobs downsized or outsourced.
- 7) Reduce the number of unemployed, so there is less competition for places from those under 45 years of age.
- 8) The Government undertakes a promotional campaign about the benefits of

employing mature aged staff.

- 9) The Government adopts a scheme similar to NEIS but specifically for people over 45 years of age to start businesses, especially in regional areas, where no similar business exists. Some funding is provided for capital or stock on a no interest loan basis.

What do we do with those who don't want to work?

- 1) Make work for the dole compulsory for this age group?
- 2) Make retraining programs compulsory for this age group?
- 3) Get them into voluntary work for local communities?

There were limited answers to this question from the group.

Employment National input

Employment National considers that mature people have a valuable contribution to make to the community and, as such, they have a major initiative commencing on May 17 1999 aimed directly at mature people.

The initiative called "Mid Years, New Career", unites their sales, operations and marketing staff to focus their energies on one task over a two week period: to place mature people into jobs. They intend generating significant media coverage including mail outs, newspaper, radio and television. The focus will initially be on the Avon Valley in WA but may be extended if results are positive.

View of one person in group

One member of Employer Service providers believes the underemployment of young people far outweighs those of the 45 plus age group.

"A growing group of disaffected youth is a much more significant problem," he said.

"My objection is not to helping the 45 plus age group, it is with relativities and with cynical political opportunism."

Summary

All levels of Government need to decide where in the pecking order of priorities the unemployed over 45-year-old group sits. This is imperative because it is understood that most disaffected voters are in the over 45 age group.

The greatest barrier to individuals over 45 finding employment, appears to be public perception.

Until this changes, over 45 year olds can only expect more and more knock backs.

Yours faithfully

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April 30 1999