

ADD Employment
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The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and
Workplace Relations
Suite R1 116 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

9 April, 1999

Dear Sir / Madam

Submission: Inquiry into social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.

ADD Employment conducted a focus group of six job seekers (see Appendix A) that are over the age of 45 years old, currently unemployed and using the service. The Intensive Assistant case manager who is also a Psychologist conducted this session.

Social

1. Lose of expertise to the community. The group stated they felt that while younger people had the 'paperwork / certificates, etc' they do not have the practical experience or know how. As companies downsize, or use contracted staff this information is no longer accessible and consequently lost to the community. Furthermore, there appears to be little interest in "Research and Design" in Australia, successive governments (state and federal) have reduced this, relying on the resources of minerals and produce and not that of people.
2. Family. This group found family relations are strained for a variety of reasons, for example, a reduction of supportive links that can be accessed, roles in the family are challenged, such as "dad can't get a job so who will I be able to".
3. View of Self. The entire group expressed a lose of self-esteem that unemployment causes, leading to feelings of insecurity and little confidence in personal ability. This group stated it is particularly difficult for this age group because of their strong work ethic, many of which have always been employed and now find due to their age are not viewed as employable. This is exacerbated by the thought that their inability to find work affects their job interview performance, so affecting their ability to find work, a vicious circle.

4. Reliability of older worker. The group felt that there would be continuity and reliability of employment if older workers were used. They would stay longer than younger workers, often until they retired.
5. Resumes. The group stated that there was almost a need to camouflage their resumes that showed that they were older workers. While under the law they do not have to give their date of birth, sometimes they were asked in the interview or most commonly, their referees were asked. One group member reported that his referees state that, "he has a good ten years left in him". Another aspect of developing a resume is by putting limits on what you state about your abilities so to disguise their age.

Economic

6. Lose of income. All the group stated that their lifestyles have been significantly altered, such as disposable income. Consequently, items that are viewed as 'extras' are cut, for example, canceling private health insurance, as all their savings have to be used up first as a requirement of Centrelink before benefits can be accessed. Finally, the flow-on effect to the community and taxpayers from this group of the limited disposable income is difficult to calculate.
7. Cost of seeking employment. This group mentioned the high cost of seeking employment, with resumes, photocopying, driving for interviews. One participant applied for a government job, there were eight positions, so he had to send in eight applications kits plus postage, total cost of about \$11.00.

Industrial

8. Training. The group expressed the concern for appropriate training and upgrading of skills that lead to industry accreditation. While there is some opportunity of upgrading of skills through Recognition of Prior Learning, it is often perceived as complicated and complex. Training that acknowledged the expertise and ability, that was short given that many had not studied for many years, and was user friendly, for example, slower paced when helping people that were not computer literate, was felt was needed most.
9. Job advertisements. The group noted that many of the adverts in the papers today are written for very specific groups, for example, their skill base must be multiskilled and broad, the ability to do almost every conceivable job in the organization. Or absurd, an eighteen-year-old with a number of years' experience, plus a variety of licenses and/or certificates, but junior wage rates. Similarly, many of the group have experienced the Clayton's job application, particularly for government and tertiary institutions. The employer already has a person in mind for the job, but has to go through a 'open' selection process before appointing that person. Consequently, the group felt that they went through the motions of the selection process with little prospect of gaining employment.
10. Employer's expectations. The view was that employers appear to want to give training to the young, but not a mature person. It was questioned whether some employers would feel threatened by older workers because of their past experiences, that it is easier to 'control / manage' younger more inexperienced workers. There was the feeling that they belonged to an age group that are finding hard to come to grips with the "new attitude" of employers in the 1990s. There is no longer any room for loyalty or work ethic. Since the 1980s with casual / contract workers, the

notion of employer loyalty is appears to be no longer valued, but employers expect loyalty from their staff.

11. Staff recruitment. The group consensus felt that there appeared to be poor planning in relation to recruitment, with selection appearing to be on personality than skills, yet the advertisement is purely focused on skills. Furthermore, decision-making, or lack of it is a real concern. The group quoted many instances of a/ a decision not made; b/ a decision taking months to be made; c/ a person walking off the street getting the job and not going through the selection process; d/ not informed either way of the decision by any means. The group stated they often felt in limbo as what to do next.
12. Future. The group expressed concern over the future of employment in Australia. While people are becoming more mobile, families are finding harder to cope, for example, there is not a national education system, so any move with children in order to find employment is made more disruptive. Furthermore, the concept of full-time work of 38 hours may no longer be credible, and that it should be directed to 20 to 30 hours per week.

A copy of this submission has been sent to all the participants.

Yours truly,

Kim Ende
Psychologist

Lorraine Soeters
Manager of ADD Employment

Appendix A

Six participants attended the focus group on April 9, 1999, in Toowoomba, that was facilitated by the Psychologist. Selection was on a random basis, with the only criteria being that they were over 45 years of age. Participation was voluntary. The ratio of five men to one woman is representative of the over 45 year old jobseekers at the agency. The session lasted two and half-hours, with a break at morning tea that was provided by the agency. Each participant was asked if they wished to be named in the submission, all said yes, and signed a consent form

Mr Rodney Campbell
Mr Malcolm Charlesworth
Mr Garry Kirstenfeldt
Mr Bill Mills
Mr Barry Noon
Mrs Pauline Wind