

WORKING NATION CO-OPERATIVE LIMITED

Incorporating The Mature Aged Training Extension Scheme
The Doyalson Training Centre phone 4359 14734390 7605

9 Lloyd Avenue Chain Valley Bay 2259 2M April, 1999

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

Dear Sir/Ms

We wish to place this brief submission to your Committee for consideration. Written in haste our enquiry is whether we may have the opportunity later to elaborate either with further written material or by way of inspections of our site as suggested in your material under the heading of "Inquiry process at a glance."

Who are we? Our Co-operative grew out of a local community group active on the Central Coast of New South Wales beginning 1994. Formed with the original objective of assisting unemployed persons to gain entry to the workforce by means of improving their chances thru training programs, the Co-operative came into existence some two years ago. We acquired premises, established classrooms and a small workshop, and with the assistance of volunteers and paid instructors, we have put together an education program focusing on the local labor market. The training takes in basic carpentry, painting, landscaping, and instruction in various categories of computer operation.

Outcomes. We had 91 enrolments for the recently concluded term. For the past 9 months we have experimented almost exclusively with on the job training for what we describe as our *outdoor workers (courses other than computers)*. Contracts with local government and the private sector are entered into which involve need for the type of work described above. Workers involved are unemployed benefit recipients who also receive a top up from the Co-operative amounting to the maximum permissible. While there is a turn over of people in this category, for the last term all were over the age of 45 years.

Computer classes are conducted on the basis of a minimum fee to cover the income of the four instructors. Recently we have been successful in negotiating an arrangement with management of some small local enterprises in which our instructors and students (with the necessary skills), visit the enterprise to provide instruction in computer skills.

Our resources to perform the services described include an initial grant from the Federal Government of \$16,000.00, donations of 4 small mobile classrooms from local business, gifts of some of our computers from local government and trade unions, and voluntary labor drawn from members of the local community.

Coming to your terms of reference - "*The Social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.* "

When we first commenced our activities in 94 we made a deliberate decision to focus on the youth, school leavers to 25 years of age. We also decided not to duplicate the activities of the CES office, employers, unions, and others engaged in recruiting labor to fill vacancies in the work place. We planned on trying to influence those in the community who could assist with developing new enterprise appropriate to local needs. For example we had a little success with the composting of green waste and its conversion to vermacast thru the application of millions of worms. This was an attempt to capitalise on the decisions taken by the State Government that an alternative use had to be found for treating the green waste We also attempted to establish an aquaculture enterprise (fish farming), but after some three years had to abandon those efforts.

Labor market programs of the previous Federal Government were utilised to involve young long term unemployed in some of those early pilot schemes that were undertaken by local government for the treatment of green waste as an alternative to dumping in land fill sites Certain skills were imparted, and we believe that experience assisted some of those younger workers to gain other employment. We had some useful experiences

in dealing with drug addiction, and the cynicism of those young people many of whom had the attitude (and still do) that much of the Government efforts to assist them to enter the work force is unlikely to provide a permanent solution to their long term unemployment.

That experience can be summed up in a few words " following a period of settling down, the interest of the young workers was lifted, applying some patient understanding and assistance in overcoming their personal problems (drugs), *the fact that they were better off financially, all contributed to a successful outcome.* "

Some 18 months ago we were informed that the trend in unemployment in this region (starting with the highest numbers first) was (1) mature aged (male) (2) mature aged (female) (3) 16/25 aged group (female) (4) 16/25 age group (male) (5) 25/40 age group (female) (6) 25/40 age group (male).

The people we attract to our Co-operative in regard to "outside work" belong to the group of the "mature aged male". Those persons who have a background of having been in the workforce for some time have less pressure as to their social needs, fewer financial commitments, greater reliability, a greater range of skills, greater stability, and other factors which make for a significantly reliable workforce. In terms of background there has been a broad mix, with a significant number coming from middle management. A thread running thru the whole group has been (a) Sydney resident coming to the Central Coast for cheaper housing (b) having collected redundancy benefits, super, long service leave, (c) having retired for many months prior, (d) spent some of their accumulation, (e) boredom, due to their inability to find comparable work in Sydney. vercoming

We directed such a person to a part time job as a cleaner.. The employer expressed a community prejudice of "being too old for the job but offered a trial After two weeks the employer offered this person a full time position as supervisor. Age as a barrier to obtaining work is well entrenched but showing some sign of abating.

The point you make in your terms of reference as to interest in establishing a business, experience has been that although we have directed many to the appropriate Government authority for guidance, there seems to be a tendency for only a small number to follow through. Information gathered from those persons points to a reluctance to put their savings at risk.

We would like to follow up with a more comprehensive submission if that were possible.

Yours faithfully

R Mortlock	Chairman
J Cambourne	Secretary