

SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EMPLOYMENT AND WORK PLACE RELATIONS

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“Untapped and Undervalued Resources”

from

THE CATHOLIC WOMEN’S LEAGUE TAS. INC.

Social Questions Committee

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The Catholic Women' League Tas. Inc. agrees with the Minister for Family and Social Services and the Minister for Employment and Work Place Relations - we too "want to achieve more people getting the right help at the right time".

Catholic Women are fully aware of the threat to Australia's social support system resulting from fewer workers and an ageing population. There are many criticisms we could make - among them the pressure and indecent haste to get women, who are fully employed at home rearing a family, to join the paid work force. The Government's inability to place appropriate value on parenting, is destined to consolidate the problem of an ageing work force by perpetuating the low birth rate. We would like to point out to Siobhan Austen of the Women's Economic Policy Unit, Curtin University that the 39 per cent of so called unemployed Australian women aged 25-54 are hopefully (for the nation) fully employed bearing and rearing healthy young Australians

The plan to stabilise Centrelink payments by allocating "working credits" to people on employment related assistance when they take casual paid work is good, though many will never accrue a working credit because their earnings will exceed \$48. A similar stabilising system could benefit recipients of Child Support who often suffer reduced income because of irregular payments from a former spouse. We are informed that Centrelink make good the shortfall at the end of the year but we believe that the money is sorely needed fortnightly because an assured income is necessary to any form of family budgeting.

Though we suggest Job Sharing we are NOT suggesting that full times jobs be transformed into part time jobs as a means of conscripting women into the workforce while thousands of male breadwinners lack full employment and a living wage.

In this submission we will confine our comments to:

- "job sharing" to reduce the work load of "almost one third of full time employees who work more than 48 hours per week" (ACTU Conference Melbourne 2003). 60% of overtime is unpaid *Ibid*.
- Breaking the cycle of unemployment which has some families never "in work" across three generations. "Despite the overwhelming majority aspiring to full time work and financial independence" *David Holdcroft, Jesuit researcher* there are young people who have never known a family member in work.
- Drug rehabilitation, education and training for people on remand, prisoners and probationers, especially those whose idleness brought them to substance abuse and petty crime and whose sentence further impedes their job prospects.

JOB SHARING TO REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT

We question the choice of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to calculate the unemployment figures. If a person on the ABS sample has worked for even one hour then they are deemed to be employed. There is, in reality, a higher percentage of people unemployed (without a living wage) than the data shows with one in 5 Australians needing Government Assistance. According to Susie O'Brien, Industrial Reporter for the Herald Sun "there is only one job on the Job Network at any one time for every 10 Victorian "job seekers". We believe that more than 25% of young people looking for work cannot find employment and yet the Federal Government are pressing mature age Australians to re-enter the work force.

Yet 49% of men and 61% of women working more than 45 hours per week say they want to work fewer hours. Fatigue and lack of time for non-work activities, including family, is a huge issue (ACTU Congress 2003). My own small sample taken from among friends and acquaintances leads me to the conclusion that most people would be satisfied with a four day working week. Two people sharing a position by alternating 2 & 3 day working week could be satisfied and healthier while a six day week would present the opportunity for identical weekly income. Our enquiries have elicited the information that it's the Bureaucracy who have difficulty with the expansion of Shared Jobs. Of course wages for shared work must be standardised rather than calculated on the double speak 'manhour parameters' which is often calculated on the lowest common denominator. The Australian Nursing Federation has an excellent plan as do the ACTU.

Shared parenting is very much in the news and some of these problems could be overcome by a mother and father each working 3 days per week and sharing the child care. An employer may obtain double the value from fresh workers and the unemployment rate is reduced simultaneously.

Many documentaries attest to work related stress. Stress is the result of increased work load, static staff levels and employees working longer hours (often without overtime payment) to get the job done. Stress is causing absenteeism which results in further stress to the remaining workers. Base wage rates must be at a level to provide a fair standard of living without a reliance on overtime. **The ACTU 2003 Congress informs us that of the *one third of employees who work more than 48 hours a week a third of these work more than 60 hours a week. Australia is now the second longest working time country in the developed world. Workers are under constant stress in attempting to meet targets and demands and there is no time for ongoing training of workers which allows them to keep up with the changing demands. The Working Hours Case highlighted the appalling***

state of working time in Australia and an urgent need to improve working time regimes...through certified agreements to overcome irregular and unpredictable hours.

Teachers, Nurses, Pharmacists, House Keepers, Caterers, Trainers and Developers, Technicians, Retail Assistants, Administration, Clerical and Reception are among positions easily shared. Employers must ascertain whether the applicant is seeking full time work otherwise the worker may engage in a couple of shared jobs to their detriment. Permanent part time positions with regular and predictable hours could absorb and benefit people seeking work and lend them the discipline that work brings. A campaign of Job Sharing, particularly among State and Federal Government employees, could increase share opportunities, especially among people have retired their mortgage.

We seek to close the widening division between the economic classes. The difference between the salaries of executives and directors' fees, on the one hand, and average wages on the other has become a scandal and is breeding deep resentment that will inevitably take political shape.

The thinking public may be mystified by economic theories but we do have a logic of our own. If we're going to have a society that gives hope to young people we've got to have one that's got more opportunities and many and varied incentives to work.

The recent downsizing of the Commonwealth Bank with a loss of 3,700 jobs - a workforce decimated by computerisation and with little hope of re-employment - demonstrates a growing, not a reducing problem. The issue of unemployment is not only an economic problem but more importantly a grave social disorder.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF UNEMPLOYMENT

People over 55, many on Mature Age Allowance, Partner Allowance or Widow Allowance, contribute 141 million hours of voluntary work per year to the economy. The value of this voluntary and Community work has never been calculated as part of the GDP. Yet the Federal Government is now providing \$4.9 million over 4 years to Volunteering Australia presumably to find the volunteers and to allocate tasks. Voluntary work costs the volunteer and the mature age person on Newstart receives no financial recognition of expenses incurred e.g. travel etc. Once again it's the agency who is receiving money which could be better spent. "People will only be asked to do things they are able to do and the range of activities will be much greater."

Australians Working Together, Helping people to move forward. Which poses the question, greater than what?

The changes to Centrelink payments that came into effect on the 20 September 2003 are based on the assumption that there is plenty of work whereas in reality there are VERY few jobs available, particularly for those of mature age.

It troubles us that mature age Australians are viewed as passive recipients rather than resources. Many mature age people possess talents that are being lost to the community because they are simply not being handed on. Many older trades people would relish sharing their talents in a disciplined environment. The author of this submission is aware of a retired bookbinder and an artist who executes a combed finish on doors to simulate wood grain (a skill much in demand in older homes) a wooden toy maker, a french polisher and a boat and furniture repairer whose skills are being lost. Trade areas are in trouble and the average age of trades people is 48. We are heading for a time when as Ayn Rand predicted in *Fountainhead* there will be nobody to repair anything.

The familiar political solution of "retraining", though available from 3 mths unemployed, is phoney because there are few if any jobs at the end of it. Instead of the 9 to 13 weeks "training Program" for which the Job Network receives discretionary payment of about \$800 per person. Rostered multi skilled mature age men and women, with the capacity to communicate, negotiate and problem solve, could be mustered for paid employment in house sized regional academies. Under the direction of an imaginative Co-ordinator .

The demise of Mature Age Payments and the intention to get the "over 50's" back into the work force presents an ideal opportunity to make available training for living which is at least as important as training for work. Who better to train than mature age people who have become the victims of downsizing with little prospect of re-employment. These gifted "teachers" could impart their talents (of which they are sometimes barely aware), improve numerical and literary skills teach cooking and provide role models for the many young people who, lacking an occupation, hang about in shopping Malls.

Jesuit Social Services draw attention to disadvantaged families who are effectively excluded from the competitive job market. The Jesuits' policy unit warns of increased youth suicide, mental illness, addiction and criminal behaviour in public housing estates with high levels of unemployment and welfare dependency. "These are clearly communities of a very high degree of social disadvantage". David Holdcroft (researcher) concludes that, "special measures are urgently needed to ensure that young people growing up in these

estates have the opportunity of participating in mainstream society, and of escaping that sense of social exclusion which is the underlying cause of much social conflict and violence in our community". This story is available at: www.cathnews.com/news/301/81.php

Each regional academy would have only a small intake but the money would be well invested if this "occupation" gives even one person a reason to get up in the morning and prevents another from substance abuse and/or prison. Each prisoner costs the taxpayer \$45,000 per year and "the no-show dole recipients pocket a total of \$8.3 million a fortnight. Surely a web of small academies, **employing the mature people** government are so anxious to find work, would be a vast improvement on "the "please explain" and loss of payments threatened by the Federal Employment Department" (Susie O'Brien, industrial reporter, Herald Sun, 8 September 2003). Depriving people of their means of existence is no solution and an invitation to lawlessness especially when, "after up to two years of intensive assistance to find work, 32 percent Victorian job seekers remained unemployed and only 21 per cent were in full time jobs." *ibid.*

At the launch of the new board of the Beacon Foundation, 5 September 2003, Chairman Bill Lawson said "there are not enough jobs in our society today. New ways must be found to allow unemployed youth to experience the same pride in achievement, self worth, enterprise and common values as others in the community - we are not a service provider - we show a new way to develop and demonstrate new things." The Beacon No Dole program originated in Tasmania and taps into the expertise of mature age business people who mentor and motivate young people who have subsequently incorporated their acquired skills into business enterprises. Beacon has helped 4000 young people find work nationally using *a balance of assistance, incentives and obligations*, much more in keeping with the Catholic Women's League solution than the Australia Working Together plan.

DRUG REHABILITATION, EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR PRISONERS

We have already said that idleness may result in substance abuse and crime.

We now draw attention to the larger academy of prison. Here there are captive students, many of them alcohol and drug dependent who present an excellent opportunity (seldom acted upon) for rehabilitation in an environment of abstinence. Sadly Marijuana is often tolerated in prison as a "social calmer". Wooraloo Prison in Western Australia is successfully rehabilitating prisoners with substance abuse problems. Corrective Services are seeking ways to avoid

sending people to prison which has become the first option rather than the last. Western Australia is rescuing wrongdoer from the lifelong stigma of a prison sentence, by refusing to imprison people with less than a three month sentence.

Public opinion has led to a determination to place people in custody as a deterrent to others, for the protection of the community and for rehabilitation.. Leading to a persons loss of standing, lost contacts and institutionalisation. Finding a way for prisoners to experience pride in achievement and self worth is part of their rehabilitation. As a corollary a means must be found to breakdown public resistance to accommodating/employing those who have spent a term in prison.

We recommend that every financial assistance be given to expanding opportunities for rehabilitation. The aim of prison is to help people prepare for life outside and the task is enormous. Male and female prison staff, teachers, social workers and people from voluntary associations working together can give meaning to the concept of rehabilitation. Accessing knowledge through the library (prisoners are trapped in a prison of their own mind, during the 15 hr. nightly "shutdown"), workshops, vocational training courses - especially manual skills and trades - are essential to prising inmates from their cocoon of indifference and sparking their interest.

We are aware that vocational training is already available in Tasmanian jails and a laundry certificate may be obtained while in prison. High School Certificates and Matriculation are available through correspondence and University subjects also, subject to the inmates ability to pay. The 12 part time teachers are employed by the Prison Service (registered educators?) and The Health Department is responsible for Young people in Detention. If the Education Dept. and the Post Compulsory Education Board were to appoint a highly skilled and imaginative Principal, giving **the Principal** the power to select the 12 part time teachers and the discretion to tap into the resources of the resident population this final chance to reach the goodness in individuals could be made to work. The scheme presents many opportunities to employ the talents of mature age people on a roster basis to help create a culture that encourages inmates to learn and develop new skills, including life skills.

Giving recognition to a prisoner's rehabilitation efforts is vital. Conditional release is often granted too late in a prisoner's jail term. Release from prison is a further challenge for which men and women need to prepare themselves. Mature age teachers acting as mentors can assist greatly with building up a prisoner's trust in other people.

The team who work at the Botanical Gardens is a model for other projects. For a year or so a prison detail also worked at the Cemetery but the work ended because of the cost of materials which had to be found by the Cemetery Board. There is a lot of history in the cemetery and a regular clean up would be a public benefit.

Some prisoners were prevented from learning at school because of problems at home in their childhood. Their ability to learn may have been hampered by a home life marred by argument, violence and/or alcohol and other substance abuse. Because they haven't learnt doesn't mean that they can't learn. This sojourn in prison maybe the last chance society has of enabling them to participate successfully in the community. Let's upgrade their knowledge and give them a chance to develop employable skills. We suggest the establishment of a community group similar to the Beacon Foundation to assist prisoners pre release and beyond.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Encourage Job Sharing, over 20 standard hours with equitable wages and conditions.
- Recognise mature age people as a valuable resource and make greater use of their talents to train others
- Training and educating the prison population and establishing a stronger connection between prison inmates and the community.
- Promote collaboration and shared responsibility across **all** fields of learning.

The Catholic Women's League has discovered that the Education Dept., Post Compulsory Education, Vocational Education and Training, TAFE, Corrective Services and Registered Training Organisation appear to compete rather than co-operate.

Education is a many headed "Hydra" and an overarching education policy is essential.