

## **SECTION 5**

### **OVERCOMING BARRIERS**

The survey of Mission Employment staff, while intended to broaden our understanding of the current situation of workers in the over 45 age bracket, also provided us with a rich source of material for developing recommendations for action, due principally to the thorough engagement of staff with the issues facing this section of their client base. This Section takes the information and analyses of previous Sections forward into proposals for ameliorating the labour market difficulties and the associated social, economic and industrial issues for workers in the 45 plus age bracket.

#### **Employers' Attitudes and Responsibilities**

Mission Australia recommends that:

- Employers develop and accept a new paradigm, a paradigm which accepts a diverse and flexible workforce, which values a broad representation of all age groups, including youth and those over the age of 45.
- Employers include affirmative action on age as a separate criterion in annual affirmative action reports
- Where retrenchment is necessary, employers take responsibility for easing the transition to new employment by including jobsearch training and counselling in the redundancy package.
- Employers take greater responsibility for the health and welfare of their workers, to prevent poor health, injury or illness, which have been identified as factors leading to unemployment for the 45 plus age group.
- Employers identify ways to gain from the value of the experience of older workers, for example, their potential to act as mentors of younger workers.
- Employers be encouraged to see older workers as:
  - ◆ Dynamic
  - ◆ Creative
  - ◆ Physically active
  - ◆ Coping with new technology

- ◆ Experienced at working effectively as part of a team with younger people and/or work peers
- ◆ Experienced at working at various levels within an organisation.
- Employers strive for a balance in terms of age on interview panels (in the same way as reforms have occurred in terms of gender balance) so that reported perceptions of difficulties in terms of interaction can be minimised.

### **Government Employment Assistance Policy and Programs**

Mission Australia recommends that:

- The range and diversity of the employment/unemployment experience in this age group be recognised and that solutions be correspondingly diverse to cater for a wide range of needs, for example,
  - ◆ Men
  - ◆ Women
  - ◆ Long-term unemployed
  - ◆ Migrants, refugees and/or people from non-English speaking backgrounds
  - ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
  - ◆ Those returning to the workforce after a long break
  - ◆ Those who have worked in the same job for many years
  - ◆ People with literacy and numeracy problems.
- Specialist support be introduced through the categories (Flex 1, 2 and 3) of the current Job Network (that is, rather than one generalist program for Mature Age people).
- Special training programs be introduced, targeting the over 45 age group and their particular needs (for example, as outlined by Mission Employment staff), for example, in technology or in skills required for outsourcing or new types of employment which may be a next stage in the employment life course.
- In developing strategies, policy-makers and practitioners take into account research which provides evidence for the importance of links to the labour market in gaining re-employment, of being where the jobs are, of being within and attached to, rather than outside, the world of work.

- Regional responses be developed and piloted which take into account of the nature of the history of the local labour market and therefore the extent to which the over 45 age group have been affected.
- Affirmative action measures in the form of quotas for the over 45 age group be introduced to ensure a decrease in retrenchments and an increase in employment for this age group.
- Incentives, for example, subsidies, be provided to employers to increase the rate of employment for this age group and to balance special incentives that already exist which encourage employers to favour youth.
- The issue of literacy and numeracy difficulties be addressed in a sensitive manner, acknowledging the potential for causing stigmatisation and embarrassment.

## **Research**

Mission Australia recommends that:

- Universities and research institutes be funded to research the particular needs of the over 45 age group and to clarify areas of greatest need, for example, existing research is confused on the issue of the differing needs and degrees of difficulty in finding employment for men and women.
- Further research be carried out to determine the regional nature of mature age unemployment and to develop models of prediction of employment prospects for this age group.
- Research be carried out to record the extent of unemployment, underemployment or unsuitable employment in the mature worker range.
- A set of case studies of good practice in dealing with mature workers be developed to assist in the general understanding of interaction between worker and employer.
- A balance in research be aimed for by shifting the focus from ‘what doesn’t work’ to ‘what works’ through research projects and by tapping into the rich experience of the Mature Workers Program in NSW and Don’t Overlook Mature Experience (DOME) in South Australia.
- Detailed analysis of data be undertaken to determine the precise age at which identified factors affecting mature workers become relevant with particular attention on 40 year old age group.

## **Health**

Mission Australia recommends that:

- The health sector devise ways to overcome barriers to assisting unemployed people through recognition of the health issues of unemployed people; the development of ways of making contact with unemployed people; recognition that solving health problems can remove barriers to re-employment.
- The health sector, employment assistance network, other departments and community organisations develop co-ordinated networks to deliver holistic support to unemployed people without developing specialised services which may have stigmatising effects.
- Models similar to the South Western Sydney Area Health Service's (SWASHS) GP *Unemployment and Health Project* (the development of guidelines and training packages for GPs on ways of dealing with the health issues of unemployed people) be trialled extensively.
- The health sector improve the capacities of individuals and communities to cope with unemployment through better service provision, through increasing the capacities of individuals and communities, and through policy development.

## **Education**

Mission Australia recommends that:

- Education programs be developed to raise public and industry awareness of the issues.
- The population in general be made aware of changes in the nature of work and the implications of these changes.

## **General**

Mission Australia recommends that:

- Government adjust policies to take into account evidence that mature aged workers who are unemployed are forced to deplete their asset bases.
- Government and community groups facilitate and resource networks of support among older workers.
- The Australian community acknowledge the adverse impact on social cohesion and social capital in Australia caused by the depletion of the skill base and experience represented by people aged 45 and over in the labour market, and that this be redressed.