



**Submission  
to the  
Senate Community Affairs Committee inquiry  
into  
The Employment and Workplace Relations  
(Welfare to Work) Bill 2005**

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## **Introduction:**

On 9 November 2005 the Senate referred the Employment and Workplace Relations Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Bill 2005, and Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill 2005 to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry with particular reference to increasing participation by, and reducing welfare dependence of parents, people with disabilities, the very long-termed unemployed and mature aged people through:

- The provision of employment services and other assistance; and
- A responsive compliance system that encourages and rewards active participation.

The Employment and Workplace Relations Welfare to Work) Bill (referred to here as the Bill) aims to move more social security recipients into jobs. The Salvation Army commends Government for the goals enshrined within the Bill and welcomes the Government commitment to increased investment in employment assistance and child care.

The Salvation Army in Australia, through its two Territories being Australia Eastern, comprising QLD, NSW and the ACT, and Australia Southern, comprising all other states and territories, welcomes an opportunity to commit on aspects of the Federal Government Welfare to Work Legislation.

This submission is intentionally brief as we generally endorse the submission as presented by ACOSS. Through our engagement in the Australian community and our extensive service delivery activities, we identify four matters which we wish to raise for consideration:

### **Issue 1: Preparation for Work**

It is our experience in working with current welfare recipients and those receiving various disability payments, that it cannot be assumed that because an individual is willing to enter employment, that provision of 'prepare for work' training programs alone or in isolation to other social needs will be sufficient to achieve readiness for work.

The Government plan to ensure increased availability of pre-work training is commended. However, we state that such interaction needs to be based on individual need and capacity, not delivered from a 'package' perspective. When interacting with the socially isolated or long-term unemployed and most especially those with multiple issues, including but not limited to, addictions, mental health issues or extremely demanding family environments, constructs of training need to be developed on the individual's capacity to engage, not on the parameters of knowledge needed to participate in a particular work environment.

It therefore follows that this training needs to be intentional, intensive and yet flexible to allow for individuals to achieve long-term life changing education, that prepares them for the work place. It should be noted that our experience

is that the majority of individuals we work with are prepared to engage in work. The real issues that limit or stop their engagement are generally structural and come because they cannot achieve a prescribed milestone through the available processes.

Any new government initiative must engage with communities and allow for identification of such structural barriers and then develop response mechanisms that allow for full engagement, irrespective of the inherent time demands.

This is an extreme issue in remote rural communities. Not only are jobs limited, but the capacity of the community itself or existing agencies within these communities to achieve job readiness for their currently unemployed citizens is limited. We request that, as processes are developed, the infrastructure needs of rural and remote communities be considered, so that these communities will not be further negatively impacted by the increase in work place readiness demands.

## **Issue 2: The Development of the Guidelines**

The development of the 'guidelines' that will support and direct the implementation of the Bill is causing us to experience a degree of 'nervousness' as to the content and practise of such guidelines.

We therefore respectfully request that Government engage broader than itself on the development of said guidelines and 'test' the outworking of such guidelines as widely as possible using current data available. The Salvation Army would be happy to work with the Government on such an activity.

## **Issue 3: Impact on Rural Remote Communities**

As previously indicated in our statement on pre-work training, we have a concern about the potential impact on rural and remote communities if the need to seek employment is not supported by creative and ongoing job creation.

We would encourage government to work with existing employers through all its facets to be a catalyst for creative dialogue that will return work capability to the rural sector.

We would also encourage Government to establish showcasing capacity of existing entrepreneurial activity by employers who are providing pre-work readiness programs that result in employment in the rural sector. The 'showcasing' may result in other as yet unengaged employers emulating the success of such projects.

We would request that Government look at means of encouraging 'cottage industry' or 'small business' activity where genuine existing employment may not be available. This may mean identifying business possibilities and resourcing 'establishment' costing against a holistic pattern of business

planning, training and loan repayments schemes with suitable tax incentives on achieving determined milestones.

#### **Issue 4: Non-compliance**

We are concerned that even with the recent amendments, the penalties that ensue with non-compliance are harsh and will create a resultant increase in welfare demands against agencies such as ourselves.

Such an increase in welfare support through the charitable sector would not achieve the real aim of the Bill to move people from welfare-assisted living to independence.

#### **Conclusion:**

Once again we commend the initiative of Government in this Welfare to Work Bill and encourage the implement of mechanisms that ensure that its goals are met without further disadvantaging the poorer citizens of Australia.