

SENATE INQUIRY INTO EMPLOYMENT

Business Enterprise Centres SA Inc. (BECSA) is the governing body for Business Enterprise Centres (BECs) in South Australia. This network of seven metro BECs and thirteen associated Business Advisors for Regional Areas, have developed some innovative programs to encourage employment in the small business sector.

Around 25,000 metro micro and small businesses access BEC services in South Australia each year. Of these 500 are successful start-ups developed and counselled by BECs and around existing businesses also receive intensive development assistance. The remaining business use the BECs for networking and general information.

The start-ups have been audited regularly and we consistently find that 96% are still in business at the end of the first year, they achieve an average turnover of \$167,000 and created 2.2 staff positions each.

Overall BEC intensive assistance directly affects the creation of over 10,000 new jobs each year.

BECSA operates a number of innovative programs to create employment. Examples of these are as follows :

- **Human Resource Advisory Service (attached)**

The BECs use 44 selected Human Resource consultants to deliver this subsidized service. It was established initially to reduce the number of unfair dismissal claims and help small business improve its Human Resource practices.

The program has been an outstanding success with between one and two jobs created with each consultancy and given small business the confidence to employ more. Over half of the businesses surveyed after 3 months indicate they intend to take even on more staff.

BECSA delivers the program to Business SA (SA branch of ACCI) members as well.

- **New World of Work**

This is a small group training and mentoring program to develop self-management and enterprise skills for the most disadvantaged in the employment market. It is focused on the long term unemployed, mature aged, people with disabilities and sole parents.

Programs are run in Western Australia and South Australia financed from a number of sources include State and local government agencies.

It was developed in response to the casualisation of the job market. It demonstrates through self-management and enterprise the unemployed can be motivated to recognise and use a broad skills set and undertake a range of short-term tasks and projects concurrently to gain the equivalent of fulltime earnings.

Programs are achieving 55% job outcomes. The program extends over four consecutive days with weekly group mentoring.

One series of four groups in Salisbury North (an area of chronic unemployment) combined, self-mentored, established their own not-for-profit organisation (Organisation for Northern Enterprise Inc) to market the groups employment skills. Of the 52 graduates only four failed to find work and two of these returned to education.

This program better reflects the current job market than the job network programs.

- **Tasks and Projects Bank**

A current proposal is to take the New World of Work concept to a second stage and use the course graduates to gather up tasks and projects from potential employers and “bank” those not required immediately for further access.

- **Virginia Horticultural Employment**

This market garden industry north of Adelaide has over 1,000 growers – the majority of which are of Non-English Speaking Backgrounds. This area has been plagued with staff shortages (estimated at 800 FTEs) because of poor employment practices and job structures as well as low pay.

As a pilot, groups of these employers have been trained in Human Resource and the tasks restructured to provide Fulltime employment. BECSA has arranged for horticultural graduates from an Adult Re-entry College in an area of poverty and chronic unemployment to be bussed to Virginia with the local council underwriting the bus service. If the pilot proves successful, a second pilot with sole parents employed part-time will be tried.

- **Barriers to Employment**

BECSA undertook a consultancy in 2001 into why four industries retail, construction, printing and transport & storage has chronic labour shortages in South Australia. It identified image and communication barriers in the four industries, lack of knowledge amongst parents, students and schools of job opportunities and suggested strategies to overcome the shortages.

Vacancies were identified and filled as part of the consultancy.

One industry at least has since embarked on a major community awareness program to recruit employees as well as identify long term career opportunities in the industry.

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