



The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Employment Participation
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am replying to your recent fax in which you sought views on how Employment Services can be improved.

In my role as Managing Director of Avocare Ltd a not for profit Registered Training Organisation and Adult Community Education Provider, I feel qualified to comment on one aspect of the current Employment Services model: The Work for the Dole Programme and the provision of appropriate training to very disadvantaged Jobseekers.

Avocare Limited's programmes all centre on the belief that in order for people to feel included in society they need to be given every opportunity to secure and sustain a 'real' job. We are focused on assisting individuals to build upon their abilities, gain new strengths and make valuable contributions to society. We are currently a Work for the Dole sponsor organisation and to date we have designed and facilitated over 95 different community-based projects across Melbourne. Each of these programmes has been specifically designed to assist individuals who are experiencing social isolation, lack of confidence and a number of other significant barriers to employment through providing opportunities to work in community 'enterprises' such as cafes and warehouses.

The organisation also offers a range of funded and fee for service accredited and non-accredited training programmes, with a strong emphasis on linking graduates with employment through our "sister" organisations, Jobsforce Pty Ltd (a labour hire and recruitment company) and Jobsforce Employment Services (a highly successful Job Placement Organisation). Participants are predominantly drawn from groups including: people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse people (particularly those from new and emerging communities), Indigenous people, young early school leavers, the homeless, parents returning to the workforce and others whose needs are not adequately being met by other services. These individuals require considerable support and assistance to develop self-belief, essential life skills, generic employability skills and industry specific skills prior to entering the workforce.

We are immensely proud of the outcomes achieved in each of our programmes and the noticeable differences they have made to our



participants employment prospects, and feel that the model we use could be applied effectively across the country.

We believe that Work for the Dole is most effective when it is treated as an integrated employment and training programme where disadvantaged jobseekers are given the opportunity to develop the generic employability, social and vocational skills required to boost their long term employability, whilst 'working' in a community enterprise, prior to entering the "open" employment market.

All Work for the Dole projects should be required to be linked to a community enterprise where participants are expected to "work" in the enterprise whilst receiving training. They could receive payment in the form of training dollars (e.g. ten training dollars for every hour they complete up to \$2900 - the value of a current Workskills voucher). This model enables them to be employed in a realistic work situation, where for example if they fail to show up, they don't get paid. It also provides participants with access to a training fund that they can easily monitor and have control over. The current Training Credit system is far too complicated and many participants have no idea how many Training Credits they are entitled to or how they can gain access to them. The amount of money linked to Training Credits is also inadequate as it does not provide enough funds for participants to complete a full qualification. Part of a sponsors role at the beginning of each participants 'employment' in the programme should be to assist them to research and find a course that reflects local skills in demand and is linked to the type of industry that the participant would like to gain and sustain long term employment in.

It can be an extremely difficult process to develop very disadvantaged jobseekers confidence to a point where they are prepared to commit themselves to further training. The current system does not support them to move on to further learning to develop their skills once they have completed their 'time' on a Work for the Dole project or in some other form of Mutual Obligation. We have many jobseekers that come to us and are eager to enroll in a training programme only to find that they are unable to do so because they cannot access funding. Under the current system, which forces Job Network Members to match jobs to existing skills rather than developing long term employability, consultants are not encouraged to research training options or to allocate money from the Jobseeker Account to training. This is not the fault of the consultants, but rather the system, as very different skills are required to place people into employment than are required to train and prepare them for employment.

We believe that a training voucher system for disadvantaged jobseekers that have not had the opportunity to 'earn' training dollars in another programme, is needed. Job Network members would be responsible for sourcing a voucher for their client once they have liaised with employers to find the



specific skills they require. They would then need to work with a training organisation to develop a programme to develop these skills. Once this was finalized and all parties were satisfied, the client could then present the voucher to the RTO and training could commence. It is also worth noting that funding should also be provided for skills/elements that are not necessarily from accredited Training Packages such as social skills, personal development and structured work placements.

I appreciate the chance to provide comment on this relevant issue and would welcome the opportunity to discuss Avocare's employment preparation model with you further.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Keilty
Managing Director