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

Dear Minister O'Connor

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Job Network/Welfare to Work programs.

I am writing on behalf of TEAM NSW Incorporated outlining what we, as an organisation involved in the Welfare to Work system, see as difficulties with the current program and offering solutions/changes to make the system fairer and more equitable for most stakeholders.

To establish our bona fides in being able to comment on this matter I have attached a statement as to what TEAM NSW Inc. does.

Client / Participant Barriers

First and foremost change the name for whatever work experience program is to be brought in. Bury the humiliating and divisive Work for the Dole name.

There are a number of issues that affect participants that assume that everyone in the program is au fait with all aspects of the needs and requirements of Job Network, Centrelink, Community Work Coordinators and the myriad of associated acronym bodies that tie in with these operations.

Simply put, most participants are confused by the jargon and reference to most of these organisations and what they are meant to do. In some cases non compliance of a requirement by one organisation brought about by this confusion can create a nightmare for participants. This can result in a loss of benefits and a waste of significant time and effort by all involved to have the non compliance ruling either overturned or corrected.

An example of confusion is that where a client has Company A as a job network member and Company B as a CWC. In reporting changes of circumstances the participants usually take it that if one is notified of any changes then automatically so is the other. This can also apply when participants are dealing with Centrelink and it is expected that sick leave certificates and other matters are again automatically referred one to the other.

Copies of documents such as doctors' certificates are most often either not kept or are not accepted by the second organisation. Again, confusion and an added burden for the participant.

Answer: Simplify the arrangements that can require a participant to call into as many as five organisations to notify that they have a legitimate reason for absence. Where participants are required to lodge documents at Centrelink, or other agencies allow the documents to be received and forwarded from one to

the other. Don't put the onus on the participant. In outlying districts this would reduce unfair burdens on participants.

The allowance for travel costs for WFD participants of \$20.80 per fortnight is hardly fair when there are very high travel costs to ensure that a participant attends each appointment for their activity. Again in outlying districts this can be eaten up in less than one day.

A major review and more realistic travel cost arrangement should be devised for program participants.

Program Changes

There are many changes that JNMS and CWCs will be putting forward but the one major fault that needs to be addressed is the requirement to produce a Skills in Demand schedule for each ESA.

Our experience has shown that the published results of this schedule has little bearing on the actual job needs and vacancies in an ESA.

For example most manufacturing employers in regional areas do not advertise or seek employees through JNMs. In two regions where TEAM NSW has had activities running, the positions of fabricators/tradesmans assistant and the like have not been shown to be a need in those ESAs. In actual fact both ESA had many participants being taken on, one by a welding company and another by a manufacturer, straight from our activities. In one instance the employer stated that he had sufficient work for an additional twenty welders. This is not reflected in the Skills in Demand and makes the basis of the compilation of such information more than somewhat unreliable.

An examination of the needs in the Newcastle/Hunter region in NSW will show this to be the case.

Answer: Either revise the Skills in Demand methodology to truly reflect the needs of an area or scrap what is an exercise in time mismanagement by those having to produce what appears to be an apocryphal set of statistics.

As a not for profit PBI, we see it that it is essential that the profit motive does not become a factor in providing the major part of the services for the unemployed. Our experience is that the not for profit sector best serves the interests of our clients as well as providing a more cost effective operation for government.

There is more that we wish to add however after discussions with various other Jobs Australia members this would only be more of the same.

We feel deeply about our constituency and we wish to be able to provide whatever expertise we can to ensure a reliable and equitable service.

If there is to be a forum or reference group to assist with further policy and procedure developments TEAM NSW Inc. would like to be considered for inclusion in any such discussions.

Yours faithfully

John Shearer
Managing Director
TEAM NSW Inc
13 Feb. 08