

Employment and Learning Coordinator's Network  
Neighbourhood Renewal  
PO Box 276  
Bendigo Vic. 3552

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP  
Minister for Employment Participation  
PO Box 662  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2601

March 6 2008

Dear Minister

Re: Review of Federal Employment Services

As a network of Employment and Learning Coordinators working with 19 of the most disadvantaged communities under the Victorian Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Program we are keen to provide you with our collective input on the review of Federal Employment Services.

Neighbourhood Renewal is a placed based multi faceted program that is tackling entrenched disadvantage in 19 identified areas in Victoria. It is an innovative approach that brings together the resources and ideas of residents, governments, businesses and community groups to tackle disadvantage in areas with concentrations of public housing.

To narrow the gap between some of the most disadvantaged communities and the rest of the State, Neighbourhood Renewal is:

- increasing people's pride and participation in the community
- enhancing housing and the physical environment
- improving personal safety and reducing crime
- promoting health and wellbeing
- increasing access to services and improving government responsiveness
- lifting employment, training and education opportunities and expand local economic activities

Employment and Learning Coordinators are responsible for the employment, learning and economic development objective, and we collectively have over seven year's experience working with members of disadvantaged communities who are seeking to transition into the labour market, including local employment and training service providers.

As a network, we have identified gaps in the way federal employment and training services are delivered to the communities in which we are based.

We have sought to fill these gaps through the implementation of short term programs utilising funding from a number of sources. The systemic issues however have remained a frustration to us and we are keen to see them addressed in the current review of federal government employment services. The main issues identified by our network are as follows:

Lack of transparency in the way jobseeker accounts are administered making it difficult for jobseekers to know and make full use of their entitlements

Inability of Jobnetwork providers to deliver services in the community. Due to resource and contractual restrictions, Jobnetwork providers are becoming more and more centralised. This has led to a lack of understanding of the complex issues facing community members experiencing long term worklessness.

Many potential job seekers who are receiving Disability Support Payments are not willing to risk losing their pension by submitting to a job capacity assessment . The difficulty in returning even partially to the DSP after a period in the workforce that has proved to be too much has meant that many will not try in the first place.

Some sole parents with caring responsibilities are being penalised for refusing a job offer that includes work out of school hours despite assurances to the contrary.

We have over seven years experience in delivering employment and training services in the communities we serve. We have listened to the potential jobseekers we work with to gain insight into the complex issues they face and the barriers preventing them from being active members of the workforce. An over-riding key learning from our experience of working in Neighbourhood Renewal sites, is that these communities are completely disengaged from the services needed to support them back into the workforce, and there is a critical need to invest in locally targeted solutions to local problems. This is, in part, why the Department of Human Services currently funds 17 dedicated Employment and Learning Coordinators to work in each of these sites to better connect residents to relevant programs and services, including working with local employers to better understand and support improved connections to meet local skill and labour needs, including the development of localised Employment, Learning and Economic Development Strategies.

I attach a copy of a booklet further explaining the work we do in Neighbourhood Renewal areas. As this publication demonstrates, to date Neighbourhood Renewal has supported the delivery of over 5,000 job opportunities for neighbourhoods that have disproportionately high levels of worklessness, and this has involved the development of a range of innovative and tailored responses, including:

Targeting of State labour market programs, and to a lesser extent Commonwealth programs  
Development and establishment of Community enterprises to provide local jobs and intensive labour market assistance and support  
Capitalise on the Office of Housing social procurement arrangements, by which enterprises are contracted to deliver local landscaping and

building construction services, or through a State-wide Public Tenant Employment Program requiring local housing contractors to employ public housing tenants;

Investment in local community infrastructure to support localised engagement and delivery of responsive services and programs, including 'Job Shop'

Trialled the implementation and establishment of local skill surveys to support improved connection of resident skills and aspirations to local skill and labour opportunities

Representatives of the network are keen to meet with you to discuss the above issues at your convenience. If you would like to discuss these issues further, please contact Fred Langenhorst.

Yours Sincerely

Fred Langenhorst  
Employment and Learning Coordinator's Network