

Submission to Senate enquiry into Employment services.

I am located in Tasmania in a remote East coast town. I have worked in the employment service industry since 2013.

I first worked for ORS who I always found, at least in our region to be ethical and caring toward the job seekers. My role was as Recruitment Consultant. I enjoyed that role, as I actually felt I was assisting people find work.

Since the change of contract in 2015 I have been employed by a different company. My role is Employment Consultant. This role is quite different to what I had previously done.

I work alone in the office. The office is only open 2 days per week, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

When I commenced in this role I was of the understanding that I would be doing a dual role and would be, when able to, visiting employers to gain vacancies for my job seekers.. After a month or so in this role, it became clear that the rules had changed and I was unable to leave to office to seek vacancies. This role was going to be undertaken by a BDM from Launceston. This never happened. All of the employment claims from my office have been generated by job seekers finding their own employment. My employer has continued to make claims based on this and has also been able to get outcome claims along the way.

I have complained for the last 3 years that I need to be able to get out the office and talk to employers to get brokered vacancies and how I was embarrassed that I never had any vacancies on the board to refer my job seekers to. There are 3 other Jobactive offices in our small town as well as two part time DES offices, all actively visiting businesses and gaining vacancies, so me calling employers on the phone has proven very ineffective, as face to face is always the best way to gain vacancies. My complaints have been ignored. In the past my KPI's have often been met due to job seekers finding their own employment which the company are able to make claims for.

Over the past 18 months or more my employers have started to put the screws on me as I am not meeting KPI's as I do not have vacancies to refer my job seekers to. I have continued to ask for the ability to leave the office to source vacancies, but this has been ignored.. They seem to ignore the fact that they are not allowing me access to the tools I need to perform my job and reach my KPI's

Life in rural Tasmania is quite different to other parts of the country, and what works in the city does not work in small regional areas like this. Because I live and work in a small town, and everyone knows everyone, I believe the role must be treated a little differently.. I have always used a customer friendly attitude toward people, as I know what it is like to be unemployed. I have been there myself. I also know how hard it can be to find work in an area like this..

If a job seeker misses their appointment, I will call them after about 20 minutes and ask them why they have not attended. Many people genuinely forget, or on occasion find they have been called in to work unexpectedly, or have sick children, or are unwell themselves, or have no fuel or phone credit, and were unable to contact me. Often I will find that they have called my Launceston office the day before and left a message, but the message had not been passed on to me. On most occasions the job seekers come in to the office later in the day and attend the appointment with no issues. If they are unable to attend and I believe that their reason is acceptable, I will reschedule their appointment to a more suitable time. If I am unable to contact them and do not hear from them within a reasonable time I will DNAI them.. I think this is a very fair way of performing my role.

I am been told by my employer that I am "Too nice to people" that I need to "Toughen up". I have been told that I have an "Unusually high level of compliance" and that I must be letting people get away with too much..

Most of my job seekers are working in some capacity, however in this area most of my job seekers

are underemployed, and only get between 5 and 15 hours of work per week. Many of these people are also trying to juggle children and home life with a casual job and 20 job search requirements in a town of low opportunity, and on occasion forget to attend appointments, however always respond to a quick reminder call.

Many of my job seekers have to travel for over an hour each way to attend an appointment with me, and many of them have very old worn out cars which cost a fortune to run, and on occasions can not afford the fuel to get to the appointment. In some cases their cars break down and due to their remote locations they are unable to get mechanical assistance for days, and often can not afford the repair costs.

Since July first when the new Compliance rules have been introduced, I have struggled greatly with trying to learn the new system of Demerit points and penalty zones, along with the new reporting requirements and compliance changes. I have had very limited training in most aspects of the Employment consultant role, and these changes have made my job an unpleasant experience. I found some of the "Language" used in the training online manual from Centrelink to be concerning. Telling some consultants that we now have "Power" to enforce compliance, is just not an acceptable practice when considering the personalities of many people who do this type of work. Many employment consultants treat the job seekers like second class citizens already. Power will ultimately be abused by some..

One of my work colleagues makes a habit of informing job seekers that his wife works for the CentreLink Fraud department. He does this in a way that seems intended to strike fear. He also openly states that he believes all Centrelink recipients are ripping off the Government and tax payers, and that the majority of unemployed people are just bludgers who don't want to work.. He is the sort of person who should never be given a position of any authority, and should never be working with vulnerable people, yet there he is.. His type is not uncommon within the industry. I would happily supply his name if requested.

Under the new compliance rules, there is no longer "Discretionary" reason for missing an appointment.

Working is no longer listed as an acceptable excuse for missing an appointment.

Homelessness is only able to be used ONCE within a term of unemployment..

Everything the job seeker does such as appointments, medical appointments, school activities, work rosters, are all expected to be entered into the job seekers shared diary, which is accessible by the consultant. If a job seeker misses an appointment for any reason which is not showing in their shared diary, they are expected to be listed as DNAI and face compliance demerit points.

If the job seeker fails to "Attend" themselves in their shared diary after attending an appointment, or working, or attending other scheduled diary events, they can also face demerit points. If they fail to enter their job search activity requirements fully within the prescribed date, they can also receive demerit points. If they receive 5 demerit points in a 6 month period, they move into the "Penalty Zone". They stay in this zone for 3 months. If they receive a further demerit point while in this zone, they will lose half of their payment for that period. If they receive a further demerit, they will lose their entire payment for that period.. Any further demerit point loss within this 3 months will result in their payment being cut off, and not being able to re-apply for a period of several weeks.

If you are homeless you have no fixed address. You have no reliable source of power, internet, phone service etc. How on earth are you expected to be reminded of an appointment, or notified of a change of appointment. How can Centrelink now say that Homelessness is not an excuse for missing an appointment on more than one occasion during a period of unemployment, because a month should be enough time to sort out their living arrangements. At a time when homelessness is at an all time high and getting worse, largely driven by tourism and corporate greed. Being

homeless also means limited access to showering facilities and personal care. Punishing a homeless person for turning up at an appointment not presented in a fashion that they would be in if attending a job interview, is unacceptable.

I have a job seeker who is a mother of 10 children, with one less than a year old. She is married, and her husband is the main caregiver of the children. She has recently started her own business. It is a legitimate business, with a shop front and stock which she has worked hard to set up. The system tells her that despite working approximately 60 hours per week trying to get her business up and running and turning a profit, that she still is expected to do 20 job searches per month in a town of 2500 people with limited employment opportunities. This is ridiculous. This woman is trying so hard to get herself to a self sufficient position, but the system just makes it harder all of the time.

I have several job seekers with their own unique difficult circumstances which make job seeking incredibly difficult for them. The reality is that many of them will never find employment in this area, due to circumstances beyond their control. I have at least clients who would be deemed unemployable and should be on a Disability Support Payment, not New Start. These are people, who even if they were given jobs would be physically unable to perform them efficiently and would lose them shortly there after. Then there are those over the age of 60, who have slugged their guts out over the years in heavy manual jobs, and are now buggered.. Some of them are simply not capable of holding down a job. They have no prospects of employment, as they have to compete against 25yr olds for the same jobs. They are being told they have to wait longer to get their pensions that they have worked their whole life and paid their taxes for.. There is an incredible \$400 per fortnight difference between New start and the Age Pension..

I believe there should be a special senior payment for those over the age of 60, instead of New Start..

Just today I had one of my job seekers call me, because she is getting messages that she has been referred for jobs by my employer, which she has never been given any information about. She also found her own employment and specifically asked my employer not to contact her employer, however they called her employer regardless. I do not believe that this was necessary.

Due to my own stress and anxiety levels exacerbated by this new compliance system, I have on occasions neglected to result appointments correctly, or neglected to add comments, or load other required information into the system, and have lay in bed at night worrying about what I have forgotten, so have gone into the office the next day, in my own time to fix what has been missed so as not to cause the job seeker any compliance issues. I have been castigated by my employer for doing this. I have also had job seekers contact me on my time off worrying because they have been unable to attend things in their diary or unable to enter their job search due to system errors etc, so again I have gone into the office in my own time to assist them and have been castigated by my employer. I have been told that my job seekers should not know how to contact me outside of work hours.. If I did not do these things to assist my job seekers they would not be able to access me again in the office until the following week, and would risk losing payment and earning demerit points due to compliance issues.

I have been on stress leave for the last 6 weeks due to my own anxiety over the job (and Bullying by my employer) and the new compliance changes, as I have been informed that I am too soft on people and have to start to get tough.. Basically I am not allowed to show any discretion or compassion toward these people who I know and have lived in the same community as for many years.. I have worked in this community as a volunteer and as a local elected member of the Council. I care about my community and the people who live here.

I am a very community minded compassionate person, and I care about people above profits for big

corporations. I am disgusted with the new compliance system which does absolutely nothing toward assisting people find employment. It is all about punishing those who are unfortunate enough to be unemployed. The homeless are getting kicked even further in the guts by the new compliance rules.

I feel sick and anxious just at the thought of going to work. My stress leave claim has been disputed by my employer and payments stopped, so I am now attempting to make a claim for sickness benefits to cover me until such time as I am given clearance by my doctor to return to work.

My anxiety is going through the roof as I write this submission, but I have to share this with the Senate enquiry team, as I know there has to be a better way of administering assistance to people in need, and stop punishing those less fortunate.. Our current government seems to be completely out of touch with the reality of every day life for those on the bottom end of the income scale.. The system is broken and needs a major injection of funding and resources directed to where it's actually needed most.

Getting rid of the corporate "Employment Services" model and returning to the Commonwealth Employment Services model would save the Government an enormous amount of money, and enable an increase to the New Start allowance, to a level where people can actually afford to keep food on the table and heat their homes at the same time.

Thank you for reading my submission.. I was originally going to submit my story as an anonymous contributor, but decided to speak more openly, as I am seriously concerned at the way things are currently conducted within the Employment Services industry.

Regards

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Tasmania.