

SUBMISSION ON: - INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL ISSUES SPECIFIC TO WORKERS OVER 45 YEARS OF AGE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT, OR ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS, FOLLOWING UNEMPLOYMENT

Summary

The issues that beset most workers over the age of 45 are also common in the Indo-Chinese Community. Mature Age unemployed remain unemployed the longest, and are the most difficult to place. Indo-Chinese unemployed workers over the age of 45 have sometimes overwhelming additional social and cultural expectations that compound their difficulties, resulting in a cycle of gambling, drinking, health problems and social and cultural disruption.

Introduction

The Indo-Chinese Employment Service is a Job Network member that services the general community from 9 offices spread across metropolitan Melbourne – Springvale, Box Hill, Northcote, Richmond, Fitzroy, Flemington, Footscray, St. Albans and Sunshine. We provide Job Matching, Job Search Training and Intensive Assistance at all locations, and are the largest Indo-Chinese specialist organisation in Victoria, with several of our offices located within major Indo-Chinese communities such as Richmond, Springvale and Footscray. In Melbourne, Indo-Chinese are the largest single ethnic group of unemployed.

One of the crucial differences between most unemployed workers over 45 years of age and Indo-Chinese unemployed over 45 years of age is that Indo-Chinese clients are not necessarily retrenched with an established work history, and in many cases have never worked in Australia. In most instances they are migrants who are very long-term unemployed because they have never become proficient in English and have not been able to find work, or have been working casually within the Indo-Chinese Community and have never needed to become proficient in English. An associated problem is that the skills that Indo-Chinese migrants have may not be in demand in Australia, as is the case with a number of our clients who have a background in non-mechanised agriculture and types of farming not used in Australia.

Issues

Unemployment issues are felt more keenly by older workers, and in addition, Indo-Chinese unemployed are less likely to seek help outside the Indo-Chinese community for two main reasons – firstly, they have a cultural pride and social expectation which does not lend itself to seeking assistance outside the extended family. Secondly, due to a lack of proficiency in English, they are unable to access assistance that is not delivered by an Indo-Chinese agency. Because of this, the following social and economic problems are prevalent with unemployed Indo-Chinese workers over 45 years of age:

- There is often a greater range of health problems, such as depression, drinking and smoking to excess, mental illness, stress related illnesses, etc
- Unemployed workers over 45 years of age experience a significant loss of self-esteem (because they are considered ‘old and useless’), which can result in difficulty with decision-making, lack of confidence, poor motivation, etc. This is particularly distressing to older Indo-Chinese as the accepted cultural more is ‘the older you are the more respected you are’.

- Problem Gambling in the Indo-Chinese community is a significant hidden problem as a result of the social pressure to appear successful, and thus a desperate need for a ‘quick fix’. This is linked with the excessive use of alcohol, both of which are unfortunately accepted in the Indo-Chinese Community. The end result is often a destructive cycle of gambling, drinking and domestic violence.
- Because of extended family expectations, there are often personal/family responsibilities such as supporting or caring for a sick or elderly family member
- Marriage difficulties can result from the pressures and financial situation

Other jobsearch related barriers compound the situation of the over 45’s making their efforts to seek work far more difficult. Examples of just a few additional barriers our clients may face include:

- Lack of work experience. There is a need for a Work for the Dole program for this age group as it will help improve their chance of finding work, build up their confidence and make them feel proud of their contribution to the community.
- Lack of relevant vocational skills.
- Literacy or numeracy problems.
- A learning reluctance exists in older unemployed that encompasses numeracy, literacy in English and new technologies. This is often simply a matter of confidence and practice, and in our experience can be overcome with support.

SOLUTIONS

We believe the Government is doing its best to help this client group. This inquiry is a reflection of the Government’s great effort in helping people over 45 years of age overcome their barriers. We see ourselves as part of the Job Network and we would be happy to do whatever we can to facilitate their return to the workplace. The following are our recommended strategies:

Extend the Work for the Dole program

An extension of work for the dole to include the over 45’s would be extremely useful as we have found that voluntary work is effective in giving workers over 45 years of age confidence and updated or new work skills. The extension of Work for the Dole would ensure that people over 45’s get effective work experience and a sense of pride that they are working and gaining skills.

Emphasise the Positives - Educate Employers and Industries

Establish an education and media program aimed at Employers and Industry so they understand that workers over the age of 45 are worthwhile employees. Some of the advantages they offer Employers are that they:

- are more loyal if someone re-employs them
- have a wealth of experience to draw from
- do not have ‘social’ problems – are often more stable and settled
- will not leave to have families

Create Business Opportunities - NEIS for Migrants over 45yrs

Starting a small business is a popular preference for workers over the age of 45. Business opportunities suit older workers but they need business skills and support to set up and run them. There are lots of ideas in the community and there is a need for a supported program for older migrants to give them the business skills, and while the NEIS program exists, it is much too hard for older Indo-Chinese to get into. We suggest a NEIS-type program that offers the mentoring and practical support for migrants with an ESL component as an integral part of the business training.

There are a number of business opportunities that would be suitable for this client group, they include:

Home Care

Home services can be offered to care for the young as well as elderly people who are cared for in the home. There is a very low take-up of places in aged care homes for the elderly in the Indo-Chinese Community as it is not generally culturally acceptable. An opportunity exists for a ‘home services’ type of business that includes not only home care but also other services such as home maintenance, shopping, cleaning, pet care, etc

Catering

Catering from home is an area that is expanding rapidly as an industry is flourishing that provides food items to restaurants. Unfortunately, people are working from home unofficially, and they are left open to abuse and exploitation, not to mention that they are not covered by licences, health inspections, workcover, etc.

The workers need to be legitimised in some way, and a suggested model is a co-op. Co-operative premises with all licences and food handling requirements taken care of could operate as a communal premises that workers can use for their food preparation in a safe and legitimate environment.

Automotive

A popular area with the Indo-Chinese Community for setting up a small business is the automotive industry – mostly car repairs and panel beating. These are often skills that workers already have, and once again, all that is necessary is the appropriate ESL and business management skills.

Clothing Industry

Small niche opportunities are becoming apparent in the retail and manufacturing area of the Clothing Industry. Workers over the age of 45 who have been laid off by large manufacturers have experience in the industry and so are able to set up their own businesses in a niche market. By running their own legitimate business they are able to make a living for themselves and avoid piecework exploitation.