

Workshop 10:

The new active participation model and linkages between job network and state government correctional services programs

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This workshop paper explores the role of Job Network under the new Active Participation Model in helping ex-offenders to achieve higher levels of social re-integration and economic participation. The paper discusses possible partnerships and collaboration between Job Network and Commonwealth and State complementary training and employment programs in addressing employment barriers. In particular, the paper focuses on ways of developing closer working relationships between Job Network and providers of training, complementary programs and pre-release and immediate post release support.

Introduction: ex-offenders and barriers to employment

The characteristics that cause people to be at high risk of offending are to a large extent the same characteristics that are barriers to employment: low levels of education, homelessness, mental health issues of depression, addictions, and poor health and physical disabilities. Lack of work, and enduring poverty and dependency can lead to a further deterioration in mental and physical health and a high risk of recidivism. It is important to break the cycle.

A criminal conviction can add substantial barriers to employment because of the reluctance of employers to employ ex-offenders and because skills and work habits that the job seeker may have previously possessed can deteriorate during a period in custody through a lack of opportunity to use these skills. When a person claims unemployment benefits from Centrelink, their level of disadvantage in the labour market is assessed by Centrelink using the JSCI (Job Seeker Classification Instrument). The JSCI recognises a custodial sentence as one factor of labour market disadvantage. The full range of characteristics is considered to determine each person's level of disadvantage and need for assistance. If a person has served a custodial sentence of more than one month, and also has other factors of disadvantage, such as long-term unemployment, poor educational background, or a disability, they are likely to have early access to Job Network Intensive Support customised assistance.

It is estimated that about 44,000¹ people are released from Australian prisons each year. The majority of people released from prison register with Centrelink. In addition, ex-offenders who do not serve a custodial sentence may also be registered with Centrelink. Those who receive a Centrelink benefit may be required to participate in activity which will lead to an improvement in their circumstances. People assessed as requiring additional help to participate in social or economic activities, which includes ex-

¹ Source: Baldry et. al. 'Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social integration?' *Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute*, August 2003, extrapolation from FaCS estimate of 43,000 released from prison in 2001 in Anderson J, *Crisis Payments and Prisoner Statistics*, FaCS Internal Paper, 2000.

offenders, are linked to a Personal Advisor. The role of Personal Advisers is to assess barriers to participation using the JSCI and make sure individuals get the right help as early as possible through better identification of the non-vocational needs impacting on their ability to comply, better referrals and linkages with service providers and community support, and monitoring of their progress.

Centrelink is the gateway for job seekers to Job Network. Centrelink assesses each individual job seeker, for eligibility for the full range of Job Network services or for Job Search Support Only², and refers them to the Job Network member of their choice.

Responses to the JSCI may also trigger the need for a JSCI Supplementary Assessment (JSA) to further assess disadvantage or disability. Disability Employment Indicators³ stream job seekers with a disability between Job Network and Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) funded Personal Support program or disability employment services.

There may be cases where eligible job seekers choose not to disclose their ex-offender status and are not assessed as being highly disadvantaged on other factors. As with other eligible job seekers, they will be referred to Job Search Support. If they are still unemployed after 3 months they will then flow through to Intensive Support job search training, and those who are still unemployed after 12 months will then flow through to Intensive Support customised assistance.

Issues of privacy and disclosure

Privacy legislation protects a person's right to choose whether and under what limitations to disclose or not disclose their ex-offender status. Job Network members may not pass on information to parties other than the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) or Centrelink, except in circumstances where Job Network members have the approval of DEWR and the consent of the job seeker.

However, there is a growing tendency for employers to seek police checks for potential recruits. Pre-employment screening, with police criminal history checks, are conducted with the job seeker's knowledge and consent. The job seeker is required to complete and sign a specific police document requesting the check. This means that even if a job seeker has not disclosed their ex-offender status to Centrelink or Job Network, police checks will be a required before many employers will consider recruitment. This means that

² There are two categories of job seekers eligible for Job Network services:

- Job seekers, who are eligible for the Job Search Support only. The Job Search Support service to job seekers includes the following:
 - creating and lodging a Vocational Profile and providing a resulting resume;
 - explaining how JobSearch automatches with the Vocational Profile;
 - providing advice on the best ways to look for work; and
 - access to job search facilities.
- Fully Job Network Eligible job seekers are eligible for the full range of Job Network services. They are registered with Centrelink as looking for work, and fall into one of the following categories:
 - recipients of Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance or another form of qualifying government income support;
 - persons aged 15 to 20 years and not in full-time education or training; or
 - Indigenous Australians participating in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme (participation in CDEP is treated as periods of unemployment registration with Centrelink).

³ In cooperation with the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), DEWR is replacing the Work Ability Tables (WATs) with a set of Disability Employment Indicators.

regardless of legislative protection, disclosure is often a pre-requisite to employment. There is a view that there are advantages to an ex-offender in disclosing their status, for example, when an ex-offender agrees to disclosure to Centrelink and Job Network, a higher level of assistance and advocacy by these agencies to employers is possible.

Possible pre-release pathways

DEWR and Centrelink have developed processes to meet with prisoners in pre-release programs and in "return to work" programs for young offenders. All pre-release prisoners who are not receiving FaCS income support can register with Centrelink for Job Search Support Only.

In States with "Early Release" programs for prisoners aged less than 21 years of age they can register from the start of their early release program and be assessed for Job Network services.

Job Network services for ex-offenders

The *Active Participation Model* which started on 1 July 2003 aims to secure greater engagement with job seekers so that they are actively engaged and better supported in looking for work. The new arrangements simplify access and allow job seekers to better navigate services by providing continuous assistance from a single Job Network member. Job seekers no longer enrol with multiple Job Network members to access particular vacancies or to participate in individual services.

A key advantage of the new model is that a job seeker chooses a single Job Network member who works with the job seeker until he or she finds work. The same Job Network member provides individually tailored services for the job seeker. While job seekers with an identified disadvantage can be referred to any Job Network provider at registration, there may also be specialist Job Network providers available to assist special client groups.

The objective of Job Network services is to help job seekers into sustainable employment by providing personalised assistance that involves continuing job search and employment-focused activities. Assistance focuses on the job seeker and their individual needs.

Job Network services for job seekers include Job Search Support, for the short-term unemployed and Intensive Support with job search training for longer term unemployed job seekers. Highly disadvantaged job seekers, including ex-offenders and others in need of early intervention, are referred to the more intensive component of Intensive Support customised assistance as soon as identified. Improvements to technology mean that job seekers are referred quickly to Job Network services, usually within two days of registering with Centrelink.

There is now a **Job Seeker Account** which contains dedicated funds to provide job seekers with services such as fares to attend job interviews, interpreter services, specialist counselling, or other professional services, wage assistance and training, workplace modifications, or assist with transport costs. Assistance purchased using the Job Seeker Account must be aimed at helping an individual job seeker into employment and any surplus funds cannot be retained by the Job Network member.

There are now extra supplements in respect of highly disadvantaged job seekers and those who live some distance from a provider. These changes will better support specialist providers as well as those generalist Job Network members who assist the more disadvantaged job seekers. Job Seeker Account funds are in addition to Training Credits (earned through participation in Work for the Dole) and the Training Account available to mature-age and Indigenous job seekers.

The Service Guarantee outlines the services that should be delivered by Job Network throughout the job seeker's unemployment and must be prominently displayed and available. A Code of Practice covers behaviour of Job Network members and Job Placement Organisations.

The combination of Job Search Support and Intensive Support services, together with Australia's Mutual Obligations arrangements, form a continuum of service and activity for as long as the job seeker remains unemployed.

During Intensive Support, Job Network members meet regularly with job seekers to advise on job search approaches, refine their vocational profile to improve job matches and monitor their job search activities. Job Network members are also required to develop a Job Search Plan setting out activities that the job seekers will undertake to improve their job prospects. For most job seekers Intensive Support commences with 15 days of job search training which is designed to be flexible and personalised service tailored to accommodate job seeker's job search needs and individual circumstances. Job Network members also provide Intensive Support participants with access to additional job search facilities such as computers, facsimiles, printers, photocopiers and newspapers to assist with their job search.

If job seekers remain unemployed after six months, most activity tested job seekers will be then required to participate in a six month Work for the Dole project (or other Mutual Obligation activity) in order to fulfil their Mutual Obligation requirements and continue to receive income support. This occurs at regular intervals throughout their period of unemployment for six months in each 12 months of unemployment. During these times Job Network members have scheduled contacts with their job seeker clients to support their job search and engagement.

complementary programs

Job Network members can refer job seekers with vocational, motivational or foundational skill barriers to complementary programs where this assistance may improve job seeker job prospects and address employment barriers. Depending on the program, referrals are either direct to the program or via Centrelink.

Complementary programs include programs funded by Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments such as Work for the Dole, Language, Literacy and Numeracy programs, mature workers programs and youth employment programs. Complementary programs also include traineeships and apprenticeship programs which provide support such as employer incentives.

Job Network members search on DEWR's management information system for complementary programs within their Employment Services Area and assess their suitability for individual job seekers in terms of target group, eligibility criteria and program length. Job Network members maintain contact with job seekers undertaking most

complementary programs. The required contact depends upon the level of participation in the complementary program and the nature of the program and whether it is part-time or full-time. During participation in complementary programs, job seekers continue to actively look for work and their job search progress is reviewed by Job Network members.

Job seekers referred to Personal Support program, Disability Employment program, and the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme exit from the Job Network member. However, job seekers participating in the Personal Support program and disability employment services will still be able to volunteer for Job Search Support services. Job seekers on the Personal Support program can be re-referred to Job Network once assessed by the Personal Support program provider as ready for participation in employment services.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, in most cases, job seekers will be referred to a Job Network member on the first day of registration at Centrelink. However, Centrelink may assess that some job seekers would benefit from referral to a complementary program. In such cases, the job seeker may also be referred to a Job Network member for Job Search Support services.

In some cases, job seekers referred to complementary programs on day one by Centrelink will stay on a complementary program beyond the six month unemployment point to complete the program. However, they may still be required to undertake a Mutual Obligation activity at six months unemployment. In some cases the complementary program will fulfil a job seeker's Mutual Obligation requirements.

Following completion of a complementary program (in the case of referral by Centrelink to a complementary program on registration), highly disadvantaged job seekers, including ex-offenders, are likely to be referred to Intensive Support customised assistance.

Participation in a complementary program will not in itself attract a Job Network outcome payment. However, outcome fees will be payable where job seekers move from a complementary program into employment or education subject to the requirements for Job Network services outcome payments being met.

Possible post-release pathways

Job seekers who are released from prison are eligible for assistance in the same way as other job seekers. There are a number of ways Job Network members can interact with job seekers who are participants in corrective services programs. A Centrelink registrant who is already a participant in a State Government corrective services post release employment program may be connected with a Job Network member. This will depend on the circumstances of the individual.

In the case where a job seeker registers and applies for income support with Centrelink for the first time, and they are already a participant in a post-release corrective services employment program, provided that the participant had disclosed that they were participating in this program, Centrelink may regard this as an approved activity and may not automatically refer them to Job Network services. However, the job seeker would be offered the option of participating in Job Search Support with a Job Network member. This would help them with their job search activities by allowing them to lodge their Vocational Profile and have access to touch screen (and interpreter services where required). Upon completion of a correctional services post release employment program, the job seeker

would enter Job Network at the stage they would have been at had they not been referred to a post release program.

Where a corrective services post release employment program has been approved as a full time Approved Activity by Centrelink, the registered participants of this program are not required to undertake a Mutual Obligation Activity while participating in this program and their job seeker status is not affected.

There may be situations where a client is already registered with a Job Network member and because of a conviction becomes eligible to participate in a corrective services program or is required to commence a Community Services Order. DEWR would like to discuss further the possibility of more State corrective services programs being nominated as complementary programs.

Up until now, DEWR's discussions with the State and Territory Departments of Justice or Correctional Services have focussed on programs which directly relate to employment. All ex-offender groups are at high risk of poor mental and physical health, and homelessness. Therefore, it is in the interest of job seekers that a closer working relationship and whole of government approach develops between Job Network and State Government Departmental programs which assist ex-offenders with accommodation, family and social reintegration, mental health issues and drug dependency. In particular, strategies need to be put in place to strengthen linkages between ex-offender programs, parole services, and Job Network members.

Services to assist Indigenous job seekers

Individual *Structured Training and Employment Projects* under the Indigenous Employment Policy⁴ have specifically targeted Indigenous ex-offenders and youth at risk of detention and have assisted participants in their transition to employment. The flexibility of the policy allows for a variety of pre-employment training, mentoring and cross cultural awareness to meet the needs of the job seeker and employer to facilitate this transition.

Another element of the Indigenous Employment Policy, *Wage Assistance* has streamlined arrangements with Centrelink to ensure Indigenous prisoners can access Wage Assistance immediately on release from prison. Job Network members are expected to consider Indigenous Wage Assistance as an adjunct to the Job Seeker Account when assisting Indigenous job seekers into employment. Indigenous job seekers also have access to Training Account funds.

Indigenous young people are overrepresented in youth detention centres. Young job seekers aged between 15 and 21 years of age, who have been in juvenile detention centres, may be eligible for the Job Placement, Employment and Training program administered by the FaCS⁵. The objective of the JPET program is to assist young people, 15 to 21 years of age who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to overcome personal and social barriers and engage more fully in the life of their communities to achieve greater social and economic participation.

⁴ Further information on DEWR's Indigenous employment programs can be found at www.workplace.gov.au/indigenous/programs.

⁵ For more information on the Job Placement, Employment and Training program see: http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/content/jpet_selection.htm

Assisting young job seekers who are ex-offenders

Young job seekers⁶, who are aged 15-20 years and who are not in full-time education or training are fully eligible for Job Network services. Job Network members are able to claim an Intensive Support Outcome if they place a young person within the above category who has not previously completed Year 12 or its equivalent, into education or training, or a combination of part-time employment and education. This recognises that this group of job seekers needs encouragement to further their education or training. Young job seekers may also be eligible for JPET (see above).

Assisting people from other than main English-speaking countries

To maximise the benefits of resume development through the Vocational Profile process, non-English speaking clients should be provided with interpreter services whenever these are required. Job Network members are able to draw-down on their Job Seeker Account to purchase face to face or telephone interpreter services for a client whenever these are needed.

The Service Guarantee requires Job Network members to deliver services in a manner sensitive to the job seeker's culture, circumstances and background, and tailored to both the job seeker's needs and local labour market conditions.

Conclusion

Discussions are continuing between DEWR and several State Departments of Justice and Correctional Services about the possibility of formally notifying post-release programs as complementary programs that Job Network members can refer job seekers to. The majority of post release programs begin before a prisoner is released and there is a need to develop closer working relationships between providers of corrective service pre-release and immediate post release support programs, Job Network members and providers of training, and complementary programmes.

DEWR welcomes continuing discussions with State and Territory Departments of Justice or Correctional Services in order to strengthen linkages between Job Network and programs for ex-offenders which are designed to remove specific barriers to social and economic participation.

⁶ A one-stop-shop for young people looking for information on job opportunities is available at www.jobjuice.gov.au. This site includes links to information about career options, jobs with good employment growth, tips about getting a job, New Apprenticeships, training and volunteering. It also enables people to put their resumes on line in order to be matched to jobs lodged by Job Network members and employers.