**Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability**

**Submission No 105**

**Name** Elizabeth Creagh

**Submission made by**

Older Australian looking for work

**Submission regarding Older Australians**

***Your experience***

**Have you (or the person you are submitting on behalf of) experienced employment discrimination?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Did you take any action in relation to the employment discrimination you experienced?**

Yes

No

**Please tell us more, for example, what action you took and how effective you felt it was; or why you chose not to take any action.**

My experience is within the recruitment process. There is no action that can be taken when you are told that you have not been successful in the position or you don’t even get a response but you know from communications via other means that you have been overlooked due to age.

**Did your experience of employment discrimination impact on your participation in the workforce? (For example, did you have to stop work, change jobs or take sick leave?)**

Yes

No

**Please tell us more**

I was out of work for long periods of time. I continually applied for positions. At times getting interviews only to be told I was overqualified. I believe this to be an overused term. I believe it is my business if I want to go for a job that is lower than what I have done in the past.

My financial position became terrible. I had to rely on family to house me. I could not live in my own home as I could not pay the mortgage and therefore had to rent it out. This left me “of no fixed abode.” I became more and more depressed until I reached a point where I was unable to continue applying for positions whilst I was treated for this.

***Barriers***

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**If yes, or not sure, what do you think these barriers might be?**

My personal experience is that getting a job in the first place is the problem. Once in a job there is no problem as my experience and knowledge is appreciated.

I have found there are two main factors:

1. Getting past the initial barrier of simply being over a certain age that employers are wanting to recruit for positions.
2. The procedure that the Government has put in place for persons in my predicament, such as Newstart requirements, is not suited to persons with experience and education at levels like myself.
3. Recruitment is often done by young people and their perception of what is “old” is incorrect.
4. Cost of retraining is often too high
5. Job service providers have nothing to offer older educated and skilful unemployed people.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on gaining and keeping employment for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Please tell us more**

The law says that you cannot discriminate and if we were to use robots that have no bias as the recruitment personnel within organisations many older people would be employed as they certainly have the knowledge and experience required as per job descriptions provided in job vacancy advertising. However, this is not the case and we have humans with bias and often incorrect perceptions of what older people can offer their company and therefore they reject these applications at the initial sort.

In my experience there is often hundreds of applications for a single position. From my own experience as a HR Manager with the role of sorting through applications we quickly peruse each application for specific words that the applicant has included in their application. This allows those that don’t have some of the main criteria we require to be quickly sorted from the next sort where a closer inspection is done. Many large companies, especially in the mining sector where there is a large pool of possible vacancies, have a recruitment form that they require to be filled which an applicant can then attach a covering letter and resume. These forms have a date of birth question that is required. It is known that mining companies are selective on age.

It is also a requirement that job applicants place the actual year that they worked at particular companies be included on their resume or in the recruitment form provided. This also gives an indication of how old the applicant may be.

Rates of pay offered to older people often are not equal to their experience and knowledge.

The assumption that an older person who applies for a position that is of a lower level than their previous employment means that they are only going to stay until they get a better job often precludes them from being given a position. This has often happened to me. I am told that I am overqualified for the position. Yes, this may be the case for some people going for a lower level position but this can be ascertained at an interview, not a reason to eliminate them initially on a presumption. Personally I have had very high paid, high stress positions and a lower level would have suited me at the time.

In my experience I was often interviewed by someone much younger then myself. When I was in my 30s I would have thought that being 60 is old. Now that I am approaching 60 it is obvious to me that I feel no different to when I was 30. I still participate in various activities that I did then, in fact do more as have the, now childless, time to do so. Thus the mindset of the younger interviewer has a bias effect. When I am interviewed by someone older I usually get the position.

**What are the incentives and disincentives for older Australians/Australians with disability to work?**

**Incentives:**

People cannot survive on Newstart

Being able to work and support oneself is good for mental moral

Working provides an income towards personal goals, eg, holidays overseas, hobbies, paying off the mortgage, investing for a better retirement

Allows the person to have as much money in their superannuation as possible for when they do retire

Keeps them occupied

Improves mental and physical health

Interaction with other people in the workforce and in the greater community. If you are out of work you tend to stay at home because you can’t afford to do anything else

Money is required to pay the bills, continue to own and run a vehicle, provide accommodation to live in etc.

**Disincentives:**

Having to take on job roles beneath their qualifications due to not being able to obtain work in their chosen area. For example I am working as a carer for $5/hour. I work 24 hours a day for 5 days a week and receive the carers pension plus a roof over my head because I am unable to gain employment in any of the fields I am trained and have experience in. I am 59.

***Good practice***

**Are there examples of good practice and workplace policies in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Please tell us of examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work that you are aware of.**

Being a Politian

I am sure there are organisations that do value older people in their workforce. There just isn’t enough of them.

***Solutions***

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Change the way older people are treated by Social Security.

Employment Service Providers are unable to assist people who have qualifications and work experience already. They do nothing at the moment to assist them to find work as far as my experience has shown. This needs to change.

Tarring all over 55s with the same brush has to stop. We are not all long term social security people. We are not all “waiting for retirement so we will just use newstart till we can get it”

Increase the amount of money a person can have in their bank account before they can receive the tiny amount of assistance – newstart allowance. This enables them to continue living in a way that enables them to look for work without the stresses of having to sell up everything just to survive.

Incentives to employees have been made to employ over 55s. This really is just a band aid. Not a solution. I personally don’t like the fact that a company is being bribed into employing me because I am going to bring in some income. The amounts advertised are GST included though this is in the fine print. They don’t actually receive the amount suggested.

Because a person has to deplete all their saved income before they are eligible for Newstart they are unable then to go to interviews due to the expense of getting there. Newstart does not allow for concessions on trains and busses. This needs to change. There are small funds available to people going for interviews but from my own experience where I have had to travel vast distances by vehicle and spent hundreds of dollars on fuel only to be given a token amount from the job provider to cover this cost. I had been told that I would be reimbursed and therefore went to all these interviews only to be told, when I had handed in my dockets, that this was way over the allowed amount.

Job providers should not be allowed to claim monies when they didn’t assist the person to find a job when they eventually find one if they didn’t assist. This has been my personal experience on several occasions. I found the jobs myself with no help but they got large sums of money paid to their company. This needs to stop.

For those older people who find themselves unemployable due to physical constraints to be given free training in sensible areas of employment.

For those older people who find themselves unemployable due to changes in technology to be given free training to upgrade their skills.

Telling people that if they do 30 hours a fortnight they can get out of going to job service provider meetings. This is demeaning. Unless the job service provider has something they can assist the person with then the person should not have to go to meetings. They are pointless.

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Massive ad campaign showcasing the benefits of employing healthy, knowledgeable and well skilled workers

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

A change in the way older people are classified in the social security system. They should not be put on Newstart and have to go through the same procedures.

Sensible retraining programs that are free

Assistance in finding work that is relevant to the individual person.