

45 + Program Evaluation

Excerpts from

ConNetica Final Evaluation

Report, July 2013

Prepared for: *SuperFriend* and Cbus



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This document contains excerpts from the Final Evaluation Report - a report of the evaluation of the 45 + Pilot conducted in Victoria, Australia 2013. The 45 + Pilot was a collaboration; Partners were Cbus/SuperFriend, SKG and SilverLine Consultancy (for 45PLUSMEN) with co-contribution by the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

Cbus funded the Evaluation.

DEEWR part - funded the program delivery

This document prepared by Anthony Smith of the 45 + Program

Executive Summary

“I am like a car with new headlights”.

Quote from 45+ participant appraisal

The 45+ Men’s Program is a unique program that helps re-employ mature-aged men who are unemployed or about to face redundancy. The 45+ Men’s Program provides a holistic program of vocational and non-vocational skills development with the prime focus on re-employment strategies. It also focuses on personal aspects, in particular increasing self-confidence. This evaluation and the applied evaluation methodology were developed to provide a robust and independent assessment of the pilot for the 45+ Men’s Program and the impact on participants. The evaluation aims to provide findings that enable stakeholders and interested parties to make informed decisions regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the Program.

Interviews were conducted with the program facilitators, employment agency representatives associated with the program, and program participants. It was evident from this and an analysis of relevant literature, that mature-aged men face unique issues in looking for work and many have had negative experiences with the current employment assistance system. The 45+ Program addresses these unique issues and aims to rebuild self-esteem and confidence. It is addressing a need in the current employment system, which no other program covers. The level of engagement by Job Services Australia (JSA) agencies is an important factor in the success of the program, in terms of their understanding of the program and providing necessary information to program participants. A key recommendation that men of the same age and experience as those participating in the program are engaged as facilitators going forward may be challenging to resource.

Along with the continued funding of the program, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The program incorporates best practice follow-up procedures with participants.
2. Facilitators for the program must have the personal skills necessary for the participant base.

3. The design and delivery of the 45+ program needs to be flexible and strengths based.
4. The program should be expanded nationally and funding sources identified.
5. Collaborate with other services providers that offer services that are complimentary to the program and the participant base.

Literature review

The literature review undertaken as a part of this evaluation, found that workers over the age of 45 years face the most difficulties across all age groups when it comes to finding employment, and are typically the first to lose their job when redundancies occur. They also face barriers around age discrimination and perceptions that often don't have a bearing on reality, such as mature-aged people not wanting to engage in training or try new skills. Like any age group, mature- aged workers will benefit from tailored training that suits their needs, which in reality should be done for a person of any age.

In relation to the 45+ Program, key issues from the literature to consider and address in the training program are:

- That the individual needs and backgrounds of the men in the program be considered.
- That the content of the program should, as it is, be about improving the chances of the men obtaining meaningful work that is also appropriate for them.
- That education, training and skills be linked to local labour markets to enhance the opportunities for the men to gain employment, highlighting the importance of working with local employers.
- That employers need to be encouraged to employ mature-aged workers and for this to occur, the benefits of mature-aged workers need to be promoted.
- That income support arrangements shouldn't act as a disincentive for people to gain employment, such as restrictions on part-time work. Again, this is about considering the individual needs of people.

The 45+ Program is mindful of the significant challenges facing mature-aged unemployed men, which are supported in the literature. Strategies are built into the program to help support the on-going physical and mental health well-being of the participants, which, as the literature states, is a significant part of people experiencing unemployment, particularly mature-aged workers. These strategies, along with recognising the needs of the individual men and providing them with meaningful training, are a key part of the 45+ program and are supported by the literature as representing best practice employment initiatives.

An issue raised in all of the interview processes was that the current JSA system didn't work for mature-aged workers. The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) undertook an inquiry into the Commonwealth legal barriers to older people participating in the workforce, which included looking at social security and employment services. It noted that some stakeholders believed that the Australian Government employment services system required reform with regards to resources and assistance provided to disadvantaged and long-term unemployed job seekers. There were also concerns that mature-age job seekers were not receiving adequate employment assistance to reengage in the workforce. JSA works with job seekers to identify what activities are needed to help them find work, which includes individualised and tailored Employment Pathway Plans (EPPs).

Concerns were raised that tailoring and a consideration of individual need did not occur, which is a particular problem for mature-age job seekers. A framing principle of the ALRC inquiry was the requirement that mature-age job seekers have the opportunity to set their terms of participation obligations, and the Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman reported that some mature-aged people felt that because of their age, employment service providers did not treat them with respect. The ALRC proposed that the responsiveness of employment service providers to mature age job seekers could be improved, and that DEEWR make capacity-building measures available to employment services providers about the work barriers faced by mature-aged job seekers.

Key Learnings

The course covered a wide range of specific topics that are specific to the 45plus. The Facilitators were speaking from personal knowledge and could relate to the position of the participants. They had an understanding of our problems. Their enthusiasm for the topics was infectious.

Quote from 45+ participant appraisal

The above quote from a program participant sums up why the 45+ Program is successful and is relevant to the learnings that have been made clear from the observations, interviews and analysis of the data.

These key learnings are:

- Mature-aged men seeking employment face very particular needs and issues that include:
 - Injuries sustained from manual work over a number of years that may make looking for purely manual work in industrial settings difficult.
 - May not have access to transport, which makes looking for work out of their immediate area difficult.
 - In many instances, will have had long-term employment, which makes using the current employment system even more challenging and discouraging.
 - Lack of proficiency with computers, including email and the use of the Internet.
 - In most instances, have had negative experiences with JSAs in terms of their circumstances not being understood; being sent to inappropriate training or training where the time is not taken to assist them in particular with computer training; and being left for a number of weeks or months after registering without contact or assistance.
 - Experiencing low self-esteem, and a loss of confidence in themselves and the employment system.

- The 45+ Program requires the active engagement and interest of JSAs to deliver the best outcomes for their clients. The facilitator reported the difficulties experienced in getting JSAs

to send people to the program, a lack of understanding that this wasn't another training program, and the lack of information provided to their clients about the program. The Skilled representative also expressed a concern about inappropriate referrals to the program and that this may have meant people who would have benefited more missed out.

- JSAs need to provide the men with information about the program prior to them attending. In observing the program, talking to the participants, and through the telephone follow-up interviews, it was noted a number of times that the men had been given no information and had no idea what the program was about. This information is essential so that the men attending know that the program won't be a typical job assistance program and that it will include a focus on personal issues such as building self-esteem and confidence.

- That the current time provided in the program for 'breaking the ice' and addressing barriers the men may have is necessary. This is important to achieving the level of engagement needed for the program to work and to gain the trust of the participants, particularly in terms of them telling and sharing their stories.

- The key to the current success of the program is that the facilitators are of the same age as the men in the program and have had similar experiences. This point was consistently raised by the men who had been through the program, as one of the main reasons why the program worked and was different to a typical training course, and why they felt comfortable talking about their issues. As was noted by the facilitator, for the program to be expanded, one of the key challenges will be finding facilitators of the right age with the right understanding and experience.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been informed by the data collected by the evaluator and ConNetica's experience in relation to best practice employment programs with individuals who experience multiple and often complex barriers to employment.

Given the range of issues impacting the effectiveness of these programs a range of recommendations have been identified to guide future program design and delivery initiatives. These recommendations have been prioritised.

Issue	Priority		
	High	Med	Low
Program Design and Facilitation			
<p>Facilitators for the program must have the personal skills necessary for the participant base. A key success factor for the program was that the facilitators were of a similar age and experience to the participants, and conducted the program in a non-judgemental and respectful manner, that was person-centred. For the program to succeed in the future, it is essential that the facilitators are of similar age and experience as the men undertaking the program. While the trial focused on the construction industry and 'blue collar' workers, facilitators from different industries or sectors would be suitable to conduct the program. Similarly the facilitators need to understand the range of barriers often experienced by mature aged workers and the range of strategies that can be implemented to effectively address these barriers.</p>	✓		

<p>The design and delivery of the 45+ program needs to be flexible and strengths based. The current success of the program is due to it being conducted in a flexible manner, in terms of allowing time to ‘break the ice’ with participants, allowing people to tell their stories, and keeping numbers to a level that allows both these to occur. It was noted by a number of participants that the reason it worked was because it was done in a collaborative and relaxed manner and that the focus was on individuals’ strengths.</p>	✓		
<p>Consider training 45+ Program participants, identified as having appropriate skills, to be facilitators for the program. This would require a rigorous process to ensure men have the appropriate skills, understanding and the ability to deal with mental health issues and difficult situations. Those who were identified with the potential could undertake a vocational training program in training and evaluation to ensure that they have the skills to effectively facilitate.</p>			✓
<p>Partnerships with Employment Providers</p>			
<p>Trial the 45+ Program with one JSA provider. As noted earlier, this is to build the understanding of the program. As knowledge and understanding of the program increases, then expand to include other JSAs. The JSA would need to be one with maximum coverage, in terms of the areas where they have offices. In addition, if the program were to be delivered nationally it would be beneficial to partner with national employment organisations.</p>		✓	

Marketing			
<p>Conduct a marketing campaign for the 45+program. Liaise with relevant government departments to provide funding to market the program to JSAs to ensure that their referral to the program is more appropriate.</p> <p>Similarly funding could be sought to market the program and the benefits of employing mature aged workers to local businesses to enhance potential employment outcomes for participants.</p>	✓		
Program follow up – maximise sustainable outcomes			
<p>Incorporate best practice follow-up procedures with program participants. A number of program participants noted that it would be useful to have the facilitator or another key stakeholder such as an involved employment consultant conduct a follow-up call with participants a number of weeks after the program, in order to offer advice and generally check how they are progressing their identified goals. Similarly the program could incorporate a half day follow up where the participants meet in an informal setting such as a BBQ in the park to share their job seeking activities post the program and to identify ongoing support requirements. These meetings also provide a chance for participants to strengthen ongoing “friendships” with other participants, which enhance personal esteem as a result of increased “social participation” activities.</p> <p>Best practice from other such employment programs typically involves a process of following up with participants/clients to assist, offer advice, and help maintain enthusiasm. This also recognises that people who have been participants in such a program are often experiencing a number of difficulties or barrier to finding employment.</p>	✓		

<p>The recommendation is that there be an initial follow-up telephone call from the facilitator/s 2 weeks after the program. Three months after the program, there should be a follow-up session with participants.</p> <p>It is also recommended that a follow-up evaluation of the program occur 6 months after the program has finished to determine if it is achieving its goals.</p>			
<p>Service Collaboration</p>			
<p>Collaborate with other services providers that offer services that are complimentary to the program and the participants' needs. This focuses on the broader needs of mature-aged men and incorporate those into the 45+ program. It would involve building a network of programs with other service providers that complement the existing 45+ program and are specifically for or suited to mature-aged men. It could include practical skills such as basic computer skills and referral to a range of services that provide assistance with mental health, financial counselling, relationships, fitness and community transport. Close links with local vocational Education providers could also prove useful.</p>		✓	
<p>Program funding</p>			
<p>The program should be expanded nationally and funding sources identified. To expand the program nationally, suitable funding sources will need to be identified to ensure the future viability and validity of the program. Suitable costing arrangements would also need to be made where other complementary services were incorporated. Funding options include commonwealth</p>	✓		

government, superannuation firms and employment agencies that are funded to find employment.			
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'The program was very intense with a lot to get through but it was great. I sincerely from the bottom of my heart would like to see this program continue. What they are doing is crucial for blokes like me...'

Participant - 45 + Program