

The Department of Jobs and Small Business

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To whom it may concern,

The next generation of employment services

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc (NCSMC) appreciates the Government's decision to commence a consultation process, the establishment of an expert panel and a commitment to enhance employment services. Most notably, we welcome the dialogue and consultation with jobseekers as they are the 'experts' and their inclusion in the expert panel would have enriched the panels deliberations.

NCSMC has read the submission by the Council of Single Mothers and their Children (Victoria), their submission includes key and pertinent statistics. It is worthy to reiterate some key statistics:

Australian Bureau of [Statistics](#) figures demonstrates the link between employment and parental responsibility: 56% of all single mothers with children or dependent students were employed in June 2016, compared with 69% of mothers in couple families. Employment participation is closely linked to the children's age: only 14% of single mothers with children under 4 years had a full-time job, with the rate lifting as children age – peaking at 45% for those with children above 15 years.

The statistics that support increased employment participation in single mother families where children are 15 years plus is long-held policy knowledge and a key reason as to why the Parenting Payment Single was originally available to sole parents until their youngest child was 16 years. Families are not hegemonic but there are some common themes which helps to understand why participation rates increase when the child is 15 years, conversely this knowledge can identify the systemic barriers that require addressing.

A single mother family whose youngest child is 15 year plus:

- Has already navigated through primary school and the early years of secondary school including the 12 to 14 years where there is a dearth of after-school care options.
- No longer chasing the elusive affordable and available childcare/out-of-school care especially if the employment is on-call or out-of- hours.



National Council for Single Mothers and their Children Inc.

Eliminate and respond to violence, hardship and inequality for single mothers and their children

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- No longer struggles to locate care over the long school holidays, school breaks and other school closure days.
- May have had the capacity to undertake further education, voluntary work or other pre-employment opportunities.
- Has a family of young dependent child(ren) who are much more independent than their primary school peers.
- Can manage the small but expected 'family bumps' such as a child suffering from a minor illness, but not enough to keep a mother from attending her place of employment.
- Has greater capacity to manage shared-cared arrangement when the ex-partner is unreliable. His lack of care may no longer prevent her from attending her place of employment.

The above statements support the statistics, they are intuitively known and enshrined in 'common sense'.

Common Sense Framework

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc urge 'common sense' to be a key policy driver for the next generation of employment services. To this end we would welcome an employment service that has the following features;

Penalty and compliance are replaced by encouragement and reward. This would reduce the tension, the level of reporting by both the jobseeker and the employment service and increase flexibility. It is our view that it would lead to better outcomes and a less costly employment service. There is no data to support the notion that single mothers do not wish to engage in the labour market, but there is a reality regarding their capacity, the cost to engage, education levels and the lack of available and suitable jobs.

Employment services through reducing its reporting and compliance cost could then use their funding to increase practical assistance. Practical assistance especially for families who straddle the poverty line is one of the most effective forms of assistance. Such assistance that would make a significant difference in seeking employment include:

- Financial assistance to gain required workplace certificates such as Police Clearance Certificates, Child Safety Certificates, OHS&W Training, Manual Handling ect,
- Financial assistance to gain required workplace licenses such as Forklift License, Responsible Service of Alcohol license as well as insurances such as comprehensive motor vehicle insurance ect,
- Practical assistance to reduce the cost of transport to attend interviews,
- Assistance and support to secure appropriate interview clothing.

In addition to short-term practical assistance, an effective employment service would have long-term educational milestones and or steppingstones which leads to secure employment.

Currently, financial incentives favour short-term entry into part-time / low paid employment rather than education/and or steppingstones that are a pathway towards a secure career. Employment plans that have long-term goals (plus 4 years) would include the obtainment of education and it would be supported, rewarded and validated by the employment service.

NCSMC also supports the use of online portals, Apps, text messaging to stay connected with employment providers as opposed to a singular one-dimensional face-to-face meeting, which has a cost to both parties. The online connection would be appropriate when it is more of a 'monitoring connection' rather than providing and seeking specific support. The online connection needs to be 'Opt In' which is determined by the jobseeker's online capacity.

Clarity

The next generation of employment services needs to be clear about the roles and expectations of both the employment service and the jobseeker. This would include but not limited to:

- The employment plan; the rights to change and modify the plan, the confidentiality of the plan,
- Jobseekers can change employment services and that it would be supported,
- A 'Plain English' statement of rights and responsibilities for both parties,
- A statement of expectations of the employment services and what they can offer a jobseeker who is seeking employment,
- Knowledge, training, awareness of domestic violence along with the available supports and exemptions for those affected by domestic violence,
- Increased knowledge of systemic barriers specific to various demographics.

Imbalance of power

NCSMC is yet to find an effective and lasting collaborative relationship when there is a significant imbalance of power; the current dynamic between the employment services and the jobseeker. NCSMC has anecdotal evidence of single mothers attending interviews despite meeting their participation commitment because of a 'fear of breaching'. Breaching is an emotionally exhausting process which extracts capacity from those who don't have spare capacity to give. The effect is similar irrespective if the breach was a mistake and rectified. NCSMC would strongly recommend a third-party to be involved before a formal 'breach' or 'demerit points' occurs and most definitely before a suspension of income support. Suspension of income spirals vulnerable families into complete crisis and pushes them further away from any prospect of employment. It is counterintuitive, and a punitive policy and it should not be 'rolled over' into the next generation of employment services

Job creation.

Job creation is critical to the success of employment services, without the jobs there is no placement. NCSMC supports employment services providing support to local industries which exceeds the placement of jobseekers. There is also an opportunity for employment

services to assist with future planning. Revisiting an interrupted career can be overwhelming and if wrong, an expensive mistake. The prospect of long-term planning should be informed, allowed and encouraged. Again, a move away from a quick fix that has a woman cycling in and out of low paid, insecure employment. Long-term planning should be encouraged and stepping stones towards this goal rewarded. *Productivity Payments* to jobseekers who are advancing their career options has merit.

Finally, we would welcome a very simple and effective implementation of a 'rate my provider'. 'Rate my provider' would not be dissimilar to the customer service tools that are used in a range of industries. It will provide immediate feedback to the government, it can redress the imbalance of power leading to a better and more mutually agreed outcomes between the employment service and the job seeker.

In closing, NCSMC appreciates the opportunity to engage with 'the next generation of employment services' and would be available for further consultation should it be required.

Yours faithfully



Terese Edwards

Chief Executive Officer