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

# Submission No 240

**Name** Sandra Mitchell

**Submission made by**

[x]  Older Australian looking for work

# Submission regarding Older Australians / Australians with Disability / Both

### **Your experience**

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

[ ]  Yes

[ ]  No

[x]  Not sure

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

[ ]  Yes

[x]  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.**

I didn't take any action because I couldn't prove that the action was discrimination

**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?)**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

**Please tell us more**

I changed jobs because I did not feel comfortable working in that workplace any longer

### **Barriers**

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

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

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

Many employers are lazy and prefer to employ a "friend" instead of actually carrying out the task of selecting the best person for the job. Many positions are onyl advertised to fulfill a legal requirement when the organisation already has the person chosen that they want to fill the position.

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

[x] 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?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

It is hard for you to get work even when you have very extensive experience in the workplace. The major factor is the prevalence of so much voluntary work in Australia and in particular South Australia.

I am an English as a Second Language teacher and in Adelaide there are many voluntary programmes run by councils through the library system and community centres offering free classes to people wanting to learn English.

Not all of the people wanting to learn English are refugees many are migrants and would have the financial means to pay for these classes.

A contributing factor to the rise of volunteerism in this sector has been the cutting of government funding to these programmes whether it be federal state or local government.

One of the principles of volunteer work is that it does not take away paid employment positions but this not always the case.

Earlier in 2015 I started working as volunteer at the local library reshelving books and working in the toy library.

Reshelving books was part of the duties carried out by the paid library workers. As a consequence of this the council was able to employ fewer casual workers at the library.

As this work was a necessary task of the library staff it should be a performed by paid staff and I would have gladly been paid for performing this work.

I have recently taken up a volunteer position with my city council as a Visitor Information Officer. These positions are highly skilled and involve the officer having extensive and detailed knowledge of the city and the surrounding country areas to assist visitors and locals to have access to tourist attractions and local amenities.
There is a lot of training involved to acquire this detailed knowledge but most importantly these volunteer positions are preventing people who go to university and obtain tourism degrees from gaining paid employment.

But finally to arrive at the most important point is to emphasis that participating in paid employment is the way this society places a value on human endeavor. No matter what age of the participant in productive endeavor in Australia they should be accorded the respect they deserve by receiving payment for this participation to allow them to live a meaningful life.

The attitude of younger supervisors contribute to these difficulties especially with the demand now in the workforce where "stats" have become the driver in the workforce and the associated practice of Managers being employed under performance based contracts where they are paid bonuses on their team/wokrplace performance. This practice has lead to bullying of conscientious workers including older workers and the quest for quantity over quality has become the mantra. This has turned many workplaces especially government workplaces into assembly line conditions where mental processes have been "Macdonaldlised" creating a stressful and unrewarding career.

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

**Incentives:**

To feel that you are a valued member of our society and that you have experience and skills that are necessary.

**Disincentives:**

The cost of retraining.
Needing to have a certificate or Diploma.
The lack if planning in a neo-liberal society where competition is a nice way to describe chaos and all levels of government reluctance to take a responsibility for leadership in this country.

Too many casual positions and not enough permanent part-time work.
The obsessive require for employees to gain a paper qualification for just about every aspect of tasks and skills performed in the workforce.

### **Good practice**

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

[ ] Yes

[x] 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.**

Bunnings was mentioned by The commissioner as an example of an employer who employs older Australians. I was talking a Bunnings employer who commented critically that they worked in a tin shed!

### **Solutions**

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

Replace voluntary work in the government sector with paid positions.
Give more financial support for retraining

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

Just give older people a go.
Encourage older people to talk about their experiences and complain when they are discriminated against.

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

Replace volunteer positions in government organisations with paid positions.

Business to be asked to provide evidence of the number of older workers they have employed each year. For example when the major banks release their net profit for each year they should also have to disclose how many older Australians they have employed or made redundant during that year.

Older Australians with degrees can also be offered internships or traineeships To help them start a new career. When you look at the [**redacted**] website for graduate careers they have a diverse group of people featured in these photographs including gender and multi -cultural backgrounds so older workers need to be included in a diverse workforce as well.

At NAB ATM's they have photos of the closing the gap campaign as part of their employment strategy. A similar campaign could be created to promote a change in societal attitudes to older citizens seeking work.

Other attitudes that are not helpful include one expressed to me when I went for an interview for a volunteer position and made a comment about the lack of funds to complete a certificate. The paid volunteer coordinator advised me to "find someone to look after me".

History is not kind to older workers who want to or need to stay in the workforce because it has been the ambition of mainly men in the past who couldn't wait to retire at 55 or 60. Many of these would have been self- funded retirees and their wives looking at being a grey nomad or leisure seeking retirees.

But the economy has changed and many of those self-funded retirees are finding that with low interest rates their "income" has been reduced quite substantially. Also women who have divorced and may still have mortgages are finding they have to stay in the workforce longer because of these commitments.

Jobs for older Australians could be created by changing the culture in industries such as the ESL industry from one where students expect to receive free English tuition to one where they expect to pay. There are models in Europe (France, Spain etc).