

45PLUSMEN

A Program to Re-employ men aged 45 years and over

45+ Program

Driving Your Career...

Progress Report 45 + Program Sept. 2013





Progress Report - The 45 + Program Sept. 2013

This is a Progress Report for the **45 + Program** and follows the **45 + Pilot** conducted over May, June and July 2013 and 4 earlier one-off programs conducted in regional Victoria during January, February and March 2013. The **45 + Pilot** was part funded by The Australian Federal Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). An independent Evaluation was conducted by ConNetica and was fully funded by **Cbus**, the Building and Construction Industry Superannuation Fund.

The **45 + Program** is designed to support re-employment of mature-aged men. It features 4 days course work of workshop style activities suited to men with follow-up dedicated reverse marketing strategy and integration with private labour hire.

The **45 + Program** has a deliberate 'men-friendly' approach to ensure engagement by the participants and has strong endorsement from international and national leaders in mental health and suicide prevention and has been designed to help address a number of serious shortfalls in the current system to re-employ these men.

There is a strong evidence base to the need for an appropriate approach when working with men. The 'men-friendly' approach is essentially the same as the 'Peer-Based Environment' described by DEEWR; that is, the methodology of course delivery to ensure wholesome engagement and 'buy-in' by men requires a deliberate approach that is a men-friendly Peer-Based Environment. The appropriate approach is important for both effective engagement with men and to ensure they are not further isolated from support for their mental health and well-being.

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Progress Report - The 45 + Program

Background

Following the initial one-off 45 + programs conducted early in 2013, DEEWR part-funded the 45 + Pilot. The Pilot was a collaborative effort.

The principal partners of the 45 + Pilot were

Cbus (being overseen by SuperFriend)

SKILLED Group (SKG)

SilverLine Consultancy (for 45PLUSMEN)

with Co-Contribution from DEEWR

Principal Partners

Cbus <http://www.cbussuper.com.au/about-cbus/who-we-are>

Cbus has a membership of more than 700,000 industry and general public members, and 80,000 employers.

SuperFriend http://www.superfriend.com.au/uploads/page/172/SUP0039-Corp-Brochure_2013.pdf

Through the partnerships with not for profit superannuation funds, SuperFriend has the potential reach of 6.6 million fund members and possible access to over 580,000 employers.

SKILLED <http://skilled.com.au/about-us/our-business>

SKILLED is the largest provider of workforce solutions in Australia, employing over 50,000 SKILLED workers a year.

Background of the 45 + Pilot

The intention of the Pilot was to further develop and evaluate aspects of the **45 + Program** to provide evidence for Cbus in consideration of sponsorship of the **45 + Program** on-going. The priority target audience for participants was mature-aged men from the building and construction industry as a first preference or similar skilled blue-collar workers and tradesmen who were seeking re-employment. The evaluation may also serve to inform the development of a national model of support for the Employment sector to re-employ mature-aged men.



Progress

The five Pilot programs have been completed and follow-up and independent evaluation conducted.

The initial one-off programs have been reported on before.

A detailed report of the **45 + Pilot** has been submitted to DEEWR in July 2013.

The independent evaluation funded by Cbus has been completed and submitted to Cbus - it is a very strong endorsement of the 45 + Program.

Brief Summary Report for the 45 + Pilot

5 Programs were conducted at Bendigo and Shepparton (regional Victoria) and Frankston, Coburg and Hastings (Melbourne Metropolitan region).

40 participants - 37 completed

Across the 5 programs of the Pilot, the average time with Providers = **31.35 Months** ranging from 3 months to 10 years. Only 12 of the 37 who completed were registered for less than 12 months. The participants included a number of DES (Disability Employment Service) clients.

Follow-up / tracking has been completed.

Outcomes requirement: 50% Job placement and / or training to match identified pathway. This was exceeded.

Another strong outcome and pointer for the future was the openness of numbers of men to consider entirely new career pathways for Job placement and / or training - and to follow through with this.



To improve re-employment for mature-aged men

General

With the right approach mature-aged men can be encouraged to commit to suitable training relevant to an identified career pathway - and to follow this through.

With the right approach mature-age men can be encouraged to consider entirely NEW CAREER PATHWAY options - and to follow this through.

Integration with private Labour Hire can improve the work possibilities for mature-aged men with good skills and work experience. For integration with private Labour Hire - a relatively simple pre-assessment process and registration with the private Labour Hire can dramatically and promptly move men into work even when they have been on government funded Provider's books for considerable periods of time.

The right approach and a simple professional pre-assessment process can better identify mature-aged men who may need other support to improve their job possibilities. This identification creates improved opportunities for targeted strategies for the more challenging clients - currently there appears to be minimal identification of other barriers including even basic health concerns that restrict the capacity of Labour Hire to place candidates. The distinction enabled by pre-assessment will aid more efficient and appropriately targeted strategies and improve outcomes across both cohorts - the 'ready and able' clients as well as those that need other support strategies.

The 'men-friendly' approach (the Peer-based environment) is fundamental to developing constructive engagement with mature-aged men. Many of these clients are deeply suspicious of recommendations by the Providers and are reluctant to commit to any new training or program support - the appropriate engagement can help overcome this reluctance.

Resources developed to suit the needs of mature-aged men, particularly blue-collar men, may improve their motivation to consider new training, new job search strategies and new career pathway options.

Better marketing of support programs for all stakeholders including unemployed / redundant mature-aged men, government funded Providers, private Labour Hire and Employers / HR will improve the current system of re-employment of mature-aged people.

Training for Providers / ECs on appropriate engagement of mature-aged men and the issues around the barriers they face should enable more constructive relationships between clients and their Providers / ECs.

Despite the well-meaning attitudes of some government funded Providers / ECs, the basic business model of the current system is a strong disincentive for Providers to help Stream 1 mature-aged clients and compounds the barriers they are already experiencing in seeking work. A different classification system for these clients is likely to improve the chances of work by both reducing the barriers against work and supporting more effective job seeking strategies. In the mean-time, re-classification may be a possibility for some clients.



The main intention of the **45 + Program** is to help re-employ mature-aged men. The **45 + Program** is not a 'mental health' program, although the practical support and the deliberate 'men-friendly' approach is a major positive impact for many of the men. The provision of appropriate 'men-friendly' engagement for mature-aged men seeking re-employment (a Peer-based environment) is a strong step in providing an appropriate 'duty-of-care' to clients who may be at risk of serious mental health and well-being issues.

There are a number of issues experienced in the **45 + Pilot** and the earlier one-off programs that appear to be symptomatic of concerns raised in the federal government's own documents '**Ageing and the Barriers to Labour Force Participation in Australia**' Dec. 2011 and the Report from the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) inquiry '**Grey Matters - Age Barriers to Work in Commonwealth Laws**' Sept. 2012.

Program organisation

To ensure enough time for JSAs to canvass their case-loads and communicate with their clients: This needs a fortnight at the very least for any **45 + Program**.

Ensure clients suit the profile - 'job-ready' and skilled. A detailed client profile is available.

Suitable time for follow-up: Supportive attitude by JSA to work with reverse marketing on behalf of the client.

Ensure Preliminary materials are distributed to clients in good time prior to the beginning of the program. This is an important point; we believe men are more willing to participate if they have a good idea of the nature of the program to begin with. Where men have received the Preliminary material they have generally done the preparation reading / work and are more open to fully participating from the beginning which is a significant help to moving things on the first day.

The 'breaking the ice' activities of the first day are vital to developing group rapport which in turn creates the context for much of the work. The men themselves begin to show leadership and support for each other. This context actually creates an opportunity for very specific work-related ideas with completely original suggestions and strategies from the men themselves. The course context begins to bring out the best in the men - they become helpful of each other once they feel comfortable within the group.



Barriers:

Many of the issues around re-employment for mature-aged men and women have been identified in Grey Matters.

Stream 1 categorization.

This system is clearly not helpful for mature-aged skilled clients. Much has already been written on this. Many of the difficulties experienced by these clients are symptomatic of the Stream 1 classification system including:

Dis-suasion from preferred training

Encouragement into irrelevant or inappropriate training - content and approach.

Little time spent by ECs in support of clients

Other barriers

- Some Employment Consultants (ECs) are still dismissive about **age** being a barrier for mature-aged clients.
- Judgmental and stereotyping clients for 'other barriers' - restricting client possibilities based on these 'other barriers'. The 'other barriers' in some cases appear to be indicative of a lack of rapport with the client.
- Little or no information let alone support to register with Private Labour Hire
- Little or no information let alone support to help self-marketing to HR / Employers
- Little or no information let alone support re: **Experience +**. Most participants know nothing at all of **Experience +** and about half the participants don't have the computer skills to access the MyFuture / Experience + website anyway. It is clearly not helpful for men who have no IT skills. Even if they did have there is concern about the functionality of the **Experience +** aspect of the MyFuture site and this concern was echoed by a Provider Regional Manager who described the disfunction as being '...like that for years'.
- Some men express a concern about the lack or rapport they have with their EC.
- Many clients have little idea how to build a resume. They therefore tend to accept what is done for them by ECs. However these Resumes are often not a good reflection of the skills and experience of the clients and are written in a style suggestive of low skill-set clients.
- Of the resources available, there is very little that are developed **to suit blue-collar men**



- Some modification to the **45 + Career Pathways** document may better suit blue-collar workers and we are currently doing this: however this needs to be done in conjunction with the development of general resources for blue-collar men (see Recommendations below).
- Some of the participants were reluctant to participate in the first instance - they are deeply suspicious of training programs recommended by their ECs and only become open once they begin to sense the value of a more appropriate approach to their challenges.
- Apparent misunderstanding of labour trends and job opportunities by ECs: For example, that undertaking a Building Certificate for a client with a strong building background would not necessarily lead to paid employment in the building industry. The explanation is that this would instead be a pathway towards a private business as a builder rather than for paid employment - and the JSA doesn't support progress towards private business...

There have been several examples of this apparent confusion about labour trends and possibilities across the Pilot.



45PLUSMEN - an evidence-based approach

An evidence-based program

The **45 + Program** has been developed in consultation with leading Australian and International leaders in men's issues. The program has strong endorsement from leaders in the business community and in the fields of men's health / mental health and well-being.

The **45 + Program** Pilot has been independently formally evaluated by the ConNetica organisation. This Evaluation has been funded by Cbus.

There is a good deal of literature about the need for appropriate engagement with unemployed men. Unemployment is a factor in suicide - data presented at the 2013 Suicide Prevention Conference in Australia on behalf of Cbus indicates alarming rates of suicide by unemployed men.

<http://suicidepreventionaust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/FINAL-Booklet.pdf>

It is a duty-of-care issue to ensure an appropriate approach when working with unemployed men.

The 45 + Program is a model for more effective re-employment for mature-aged men

Better integration with private Labour Hire

Better information for government funded Providers to work with

New Career Pathways

The **45 + Program** is able to facilitate men to re-think their future and in many cases to create an entirely new Career Pathway.

Transferable Skills

45 + is able to facilitate the consideration of broader 'transferable skills' for the participants. Blue-collar workers especially have little familiarity with this concept even when they themselves often possess valuable transferable skills.

Creative self-marketing

The 'men-friendly' approach allows for a good deal of creativity in the development of self-marketing strategies.



Recommendations

- Better integration with private Labour Hire
- Training for Providers and ECs in appropriate respectful engagement of mature-aged clients
- Review of the content and marketing of government resources and services such as **Experience +**
- Development of resources with appropriate content and style for mature-aged clients; Information about
 - Training and the training industry
 - NEIS
 - Self-marketing strategies
 - Growth industries and potential new career pathways
 - A 'Skills Explained' resource: written for blue-collar workers
 - Basic IT Training: written for blue-collar workers
- Pre-Assessment: The evidence from the Pilot suggests that a simple pre-assessment pre-selection process can get improved job outcomes for clients with good skills and experience with the integration directly into private labour hire. We need different and more targeted strategies for harder to place clients such as DES.
- General follow-up support: While our first preference with the participants is to help them get work, as another option we try and open the idea of different pathways that may include training. As we have described, many of the men are initially resistant to doing any further training; we work towards bringing about a more positive attitude to this first - and then we give them the opportunity to think through different pathways. Some men need more time to think through the possibilities, sometimes some weeks beyond the completion of the 4 days of the **45 +** course - work. A systematic follow-up is needed to help keep these men motivated.
- Review of **Experience +**: including content and style to suit the demographic, access issues and the current marketing strategies
- Stronger /more effective partnership with Employers / Business to promote re-employment of mature-age people. For example; Aged Care - how Trades skills can be used in the Aged Care industry



- Review of the 'mutual obligations' as it impacts mature-aged men: clearly 'handing out the resume and applying for x number of jobs per fortnight' is not effective. It is demeaning, ineffective and time-wasting from other possible strategies.
- For mature-aged men, the changes to the workforce mean that without relevant training many find great difficulty in moving directly into a new job. To reduce the likelihood of long-term unemployment for these clients (and the enormous economic and social costs of this) the pathway options should be expanded to ensure relative training to a suitable career pathway option is supported - rather than being left to the discretion of government funded Providers / ECs who may be reluctant to fund a substantial training program such as a Certificate 4 level.
- Related to this: Review of JSA practices around 'encouraging' mature-aged clients to do training programs not necessarily helpful and possibly distinctly unhelpful to the client. For example, the practice of skilled and experienced 'job-ready' mature-aged men being 'encouraged' into Cert 1 or 2 programs 'to help their confidence'. The feedback from some participants themselves is that some of the courses they have done have been humiliating for them but they have had to endure the humiliation under threat of 'compliance'.

This concern applies to most men with strong skills and experience who are job ready and willing, not just the mature-aged men.

It is not appropriate to push an adult man with good work history, skills and ethic into low level courses where the content and the structure of the course may be unsuitable to his taste, experience and cultural background.

- **Complementary and / or Follow-up 'men-friendly' programs:**

Training awareness: The majority of the 45 + participants have very little idea of how the training industry works and how it can impact on them and improve their work chances. We suggest a preliminary resource prior to the 45 + and then more standard training industry presentations with content developed to suit mature-aged men to complement a Peer - based environment for training.

Basic IT training: many of the mature-aged men without IT skills are particularly resistant to considering basic IT training. The 45 + has managed to motivate some of these men. We recommend a 'men-friendly' module that serves as both a one-off training unit in its own right and as a first module as a conduit to more extensive IT training including online training.

NEIS preparation

Better awareness and support of NEIS - many 'Tradies' are small - business people and are not daunted by the idea of developing a small business - if they have the right business idea. While promoting small business ideas is not a priority of 45 + to date, sensible ideas for small business do emerge. We suggest a follow-up half day men-friendly session with a NEIS consultant to capture a small business idea on paper to then present to NEIS. This session need not be constrained for numbers - up to 18 participants would work.



- **45 + as Referral opportunity** - education / training; health / mental health

The 45 + presents a good opportunity for direct access to men who may benefit from other support systems - this therefore becomes a strong option for targeted marketing of these other support services. This would also be responsible leadership and fulfill a 'duty-of-care' initiative for clients who may be at risk of a range of health and mental health and well-being issues.

Appendices - Attachments