Innovative community responses in overcoming barriers to employment

Stephen Ziguras and Jacinda Kleidon

June 2005

Prepared for the Department of Victorian Communities

Brotherhood of St Laurence
67 Brunswick St
Fitzroy Vic. 3065
ABN 24 603 467 024

Ph: (03) 9483 1183

Internet: www.bsl.org.au

Introduction

The Department for Victorian Communities is leading a state government initiative to improve workforce participation in Victoria. As part of this work, DVC commissioned the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) to document four case studies of innovative community responses to overcoming barriers to employment. The following examples were chosen:

1. Neighbourhood Renewal in Fitzroy and Collingwood
2. The Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES)/Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) cleaning enterprise
3. YP^4 – The young homeless jobseekers trial
4. Westgate Community Initiatives Group (WCIG) Disability Employment Programs

These examples are described below. For each, we have provided a brief description of the project, how partnerships were formed and sustained, the involvement of community, employment outcomes, and strengths and limitations of the particular project. Case studies were chosen based on our knowledge of a range of employment initiatives and the availability of information in a short time frame. We selected those that worked with people with significant disadvantages in the labour market, were attempting to integrate different programs or services within a community orientation, and were doing something unusual. Some reflections on the approaches and possible implications for policy are presented at the end of this document.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the following people who provided information for these case studies:

George Housakos and Pam Temby, Brotherhood of St Laurence
Louise Coventry and Deb Batterham, YP^4 project, Hanover Welfare Services
Ken Marchingo, Loddon Mallee Housing Services
Michael Dunphy, Westgate Community Initiative Group, Disability Employment Program

Responsibility for any errors of commission or omission lies with the authors.

1 Neighbourhood renewal in Fitzroy and Collingwood

Project description

The Brotherhood of St Laurence developed an innovative approach to employment assistance in conjunction with the Victorian Government's Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) strategy. Neighbourhood Renewal, based within the Victorian Office of Housing, aims to bring together the state government, local communities, businesses and service providers to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the rest of the state. It focuses on employment as well as health, housing, community participation, personal safety and improved access to transport. The large public housing estates in Fitzroy and Collingwood were identified as NR sites in July 2002.

The BSL has been active in the field of employment services, research and policy for many years. It provides several federally funded programs including Job Network, Personal Support Programme (PSP), Jobs Placement, Education and Training program (JPET), Transitions to Work, Green Corps, and Disability Open Employment, and also provides places through the state-funded Community Jobs Program. The BSL runs a group training organisation, STEP, and is also a registered training organisation. The BSL has a strong employment services team in Fitzroy which works with many residents of the Atherton Gardens housing estate and became a key partner with NR in the local area.

Residents of the Atherton Gardens Public Housing Estate experience high levels of economic and social disadvantage. Ninety-five per cent of the 2000 residents are on income support, 26 per cent are single parents, 17 per cent are on disability support and 24 per cent are on Newstart Allowance. It is a culturally and ethnically diverse community with 39 per cent Vietnamese, 11 per cent Chinese, 4 per cent Turkish, 10 per cent other ethnic groups and the rest of English-speaking background. The Collingwood Public Housing Estate has similar resident demographics.

Over the past two years, the BSL has worked with long-term unemployed residents and now assisted more than 200 people through tailor-made pre-employment programs and traineeships within government, business and not for profit organisations. This group is quite diverse:

- average age 34 years
- 66 per cent female
- 66 per cent receiving Newstart Allowance, 15 per cent Parenting Payment Single and 10 per cent Disability Support Pension
- 75 per cent out of work for more than two years.

Several components of the BSL approach can be identified:

Community engagement

Before any programs commenced, a period of community engagement was undertaken as part of the general NR approach. This included a formal survey of residents and more informal consultation (further details below).

Intensive personal support

The BSL identified several employment barriers facing residents. These included limited English, uncertainty about capacity to meet job requirements, physical and mental health problems, family conflict, caring responsibilities, lack of recent work experience, low levels of education, social isolation and, overlaid on all of these, a sense of hopelessness and lack of self-confidence often accompanying long-term unemployment. A supportive delivery model that assisted with personal issues in addition to work skill development was thought to be crucial.

The BSL established a support worker position to work one-on-one with individuals to manage personal issues whilst maintaining their training schedule and employment placements. This worker helps participants to gain access to drug and alcohol support services, legal aid, family support counselling and child-care, where needed. The worker assists in dealing with Centrelink, housing issues and utilities such as telephone and electricity services.

Family issues and crises can affect attendance at work, so the support worker is sometimes asked to support or provide counselling to other family members. Providing this individual support and coordinating services often required by residents greatly enhances the prospect of sustainable employment and learning outcomes. The BSL believes that the support worker has become well-known and trusted by residents and acts as a 'bridge' between residents and employment or training programs. The position also allows the team to maintain long-term contact with participants, helping them maintain an employment focus if they again become unemployed.

Pre-vocational training

Since many participants had not worked for a long time, they often lacked confidence in their own abilities, and in some cases, needed to build their skills in areas as communication, team building and conflict resolution. The BSL established pre-vocational training in these areas, in some cases based on on-the-job work experience. The training enabled people to establish daily work routines, manage their personal issues whilst maintaining their training/work placement schedule and confirm their interest in employment.

The training program attended to both curriculum delivery and an individual's specific needs such as numeracy and literacy, culture, health and well-being. As a Registered Training Organisation, the BSL delivered the accredited training. Usually this was through New Apprenticeships Access Program (NAAP) funding for Certificate II level training programs, and in most cases, this led on to a traineeship or other educational options. Each program utilised a trainer and participants continued to have access to the support worker. The trainer coordinated the training in both individual and group settings whilst the support worker continued to work with individuals, and family members if requested. Of those who participated, about two-thirds spent 4 weeks in this program, while the remaining third spent about 17 weeks – NAAP funding allows the pre-vocational training period to vary according to the needs of participants.

Work experience

Work experience was also a central part of the approach. By enabling people to 'learn on the job' within a supportive work environment, it increases self-esteem and confidence, re-acquaints long-term unemployed people with a daily work routine and employer expectations and provides the experience required when applying for work. Paid work experience was funded by the State government Community Jobs Program (usually for 13–16 weeks), but some people undertook unpaid work experience. It took place in BSL services, other local health, housing and community services and the Office of Housing.

Traineeships

Following pre-vocational training and work experience, about three-quarters of participants went on to undertake a traineeship. Common areas included aged care, child-care, cleaning, administration, and hospitality. Trainees gained full certificates and support continued on the job. BSL states that it has a completion rate for traineeships of approximately 90 per cent, which contrasts to an average for all traineeships of around half this (45 per cent). This is attributed to the intensive support provided to both the trainee and the employer.

Post-placement support

Staff identified that strategic post-placement support was crucial for job retention. The period immediately following the start of a new job can be quite demanding: dealing with the costs of travel and clothing, arranging child-care, getting used to a work routine and sorting out Centrelink payment changes can be difficult and stressful. Post-placement support for both the employee and the employer enabled a smooth transition to work and continuing employment. It also provided a 'safety net' for people who became unemployed again, through access to alternative employment, training or support service options. The support worker provided this assistance during the post-placement period.

Partnerships

According to BSL staff, the Neighbourhood Renewal initiative has been an important driver for change. It has invested in disadvantaged communities such as the Atherton Gardens and Collingwood Estates, adopted a whole of government approach and worked with community and residents to increase employment, training and education opportunities.

In order to promote the employment of local residents, the State government agreed to alter the estate cleaning contract to include a requirement that one-third of people employed by the contractors must be local residents. This led to closer collaboration with the cleaning company, with the BSL providing pre-vocational training and ongoing support to residents employed in the company.

Another important feature of NR has been a willingness to develop ideas over time in response to local community aspirations. Some aspects of NR are centrally specified (e.g. the initial community survey) but others have been developed on the ground. For example, the BSL wanted to pursue a traineeship model for employment assistance, and despite some initial uncertainty about its viability, the NR team was strongly supportive.

Community

The location for NR and for the BSL work in Fitzroy and Collingwood was the public housing estates. While housing tenure is the primary focus, residents generally face significant barriers to employment.

Two features of the NR governance process have been important links to the local community. First, a local partnership group was established, with residents as at least 50 per cent of members. The group's role is to reflect the views of residents, determine priorities for action and to participate in planning. A second process has been a community survey of residents, carried out by residents themselves using a standard questionnaire developed by Swinburne University. This has allowed residents across all NR sites to express their priorities and concerns, in a way which is

comparable and systematic. It is envisaged that future community surveys will form part of the evaluation process.

Early in the community consultation process, residents identified concerns with cleaning, security and maintenance on the estates. In response, the state government agreed to fund positions for concierges who would act as 'soft security' and to provide additional maintenance positions. Some additional administrative jobs were also identified in the Office of Housing on the estates.

The BSL funded its own outreach staff until the State government established funding across NR sites for Employment and Learning Coordinator positions which attempt to link public housing residents with employment and education services. These positions are a crucial link between services and residents. Although their roles vary across the state, a key component is building relationships and trust with residents using a community development approach.

Employment outcomes

The types of jobs for which training was provided were based both on individual interests and identified local vacancies or opportunities. As a provider of both aged care and child-care services, the BSL was aware that both these sectors were finding it difficult to recruit suitably trained and experienced staff. Another focus was the cleaning industry, which became a separate initiative in itself (see the next case study).

The BSL has collected some information about the employment status of program participants. Of 117 people for whom data is available as at August 2004, 73 were in paid employment (62 per cent), with 43 of these still completing their traineeships while working. Another 20 per cent were still on benefits, of whom about a quarter were studying. The status of the remaining 18 per cent was not known: some of these were early participants and some were known to have gone into employment. No data is available about the actual date that people moved into employment or the average length of time taken to move into work. However the outcomes described above were at a point 14 months (on average) after participants were first enrolled.

Overall, then, probably two-thirds of participants gain employment through the program. This is a high success rate considering the fact that most people have a long history of unemployment or disconnection from the labour market.

Strengths and limitations

There are several important aspects to the BSL approach. To start with, and as part of NR principles, the process started by and identifying key community aspirations and concerns of local residents. Both through formal survey and more informal consultation, access to employment was identified as a major priority by residents. This process also led to the establishment of local participatory structures and ongoing relationships with residents which are important in maintaining a sense of trust and credibility.

BSL staff believe that setting a tangible goal has been important to fostering participation. In particular, several job vacancies (in cleaning, concierge and maintenance) were available to residents who participated in pre-vocational training. Rather than undertaking training which could in theory lead to a job (but which in the past has not always done so), there was a stronger connection here between training and the employment at the end. This suggests that training is most effective for long-term unemployed people if it is linked to a specific job.

Another strength of the BSL model has been an 'investment' approach which uses a longer timeframe. Investment in job-specific training and in work experience develops skills and confidence. This represents more of a 'human capital' approach to employment assistance typical of some European models, but with a stronger focus on employment rather than general training. The timeframe varies according to individual needs, but 6–12 months is common. This allows people to move into employment gradually, and helps individuals better manage the dramatic changes which necessarily occur in moving from long-term unemployment to full-time work. These impacts (such as changes to lifestyle and pace of life, increased costs from travel, work expenses and loss of concession card, managing child-care or other caring responsibilities, learning new skills and processes) are often so stressful that they compromise job retention. Moving gradually into full-time work over a period of months, with post-placement support, allows these issues to be dealt with more effectively.

The BSL use of traineeships combines a training emphasis with some features of 'intermediate labour markets' (ILM). ILMs provide a period of transitional employment which allows on-the-job skill development and learning of work requirements but removes the risk from employers during this period. Group training organisations (GTOs) were established as a form of ILM in order to promote greater uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships by employers. GTOs employ trainees directly and place them with a host employer, thereby removing risk and administrative costs of traineeships for employers (particularly small business). Using a GTO as a transitional employer for long-term unemployed people is a particularly innovative aspect of the BSL approach.

Providing intensive personal support at the same time as training and employment assistance seems to be an effective way of overcoming non-vocational barriers within an overall program focused on employment outcomes. This contrasts with the policy underpinning PSP and the Job Network, which assumes that people will first sort out personal barriers in PSP and then move into employment assistance once these have all been resolved. However many personal issues faced by unemployed people are directly related to lack of employment and income, and dealing with these concurrently rather than sequentially appears to be more effective for the target group in the BSL program.

Finally, the integrated governance model of NR has been an important contributor to the project. The NR philosophy of working with communities in a flexible, cross-sectoral way has allowed much of the 'joining up' at the local level. In particular, NR has allowed a program model to evolve through consultation, discussion and negotiation, rather than through a simple contract specification and delivery approach which limits local responsiveness and innovation. This is not to

say that once successful models are developed, they cannot be described and then implemented in similar (if not identical) ways in other areas.

One limitation of the program described here is the lack of connection with key Australian Government programs such as Job Network and Personal Support Programme. This may be because the Job Network has more immediate focus on job search rather than training, and the relationship between PSP and Job Network is sequential rather than concurrent, making it more difficult to combine them. However, there does seem scope for a closer alignment of these programs with the approach taken by the BSL, particularly with traineeships and group training organisations. The next case study describes a project where this has started to occur.

Most of the revenue for the BSL program comes from several existing government programs, but this has had to be supplemented from BSL donations. The cost and time required to combine different types of support and the shortfall in funding from recurrent sources mean this program could be difficult to replicate. However, combining this model with programs such as PSP, Job Network and JPET could help overcome the shortfall, providing program guidelines were amended to allow greater integration.

2 AMES/BSL cleaning partnership

Project description

Since 2003 the Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES) and the BSL have developed a joint cleaning enterprise which undertakes commercial cleaning contracts and also provides a vehicle for employment and training of disadvantaged jobseekers.

AMES is an adult education institute governed by a 10-member board reporting to the Minister for Eduction and Training. It provides an extensive range of adult education, training and employment programs to a diverse client community at state, national and international levels. Services and programs are delivered through three major divisions – AMES Education, AMES Employment and AMES Community and Business Development. AMES operates a specialist Job Network contract for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, while the BSL operates the STEP group training company and is also a registered training organisation. The target group includes people who:

- are long-term unemployed
- have significant employment barriers including CALD background and public housing tenants
- will benefit from the program
- are seeking entry-level jobs.

Most participants have been unemployed for at least 5 years. They are drawn from clients of the AMES Job Network services and from contact with residents of public housing estates.

Participants are given a 12-month employment contract as trainees working up to 15 hours per week. A conscious decision was made to provide part-time work only, based partly on the understanding that many people would only be able to cope with part-time work initially, and also to provide an incentive for participants to look for other positions if they wanted more hours of work once they had become more confident and capable in the job. They are provided with on-the-job training and complete the Certificate III in Asset Maintenance (Cleaning and Operations).

Program management is a responsibility shared between BSL and AMES. Governance of the program happens across three structures, outlined in a memorandum of understanding between the two parties:

- A board consisting of AMES, BSL and Industry representatives provides risk management and coordination of the program across the two organisations.
- A full-time program manager is responsible for the overall management of the enterprise and reports to the board.
- Two operational positions provide industry management and social support and both report to the program manager.

An operations manager has responsibility for the overall quality of work done by trainees and ensuring that the program meets its contract requirements. A clear distinction is made between the overall management of the joint venture and operations management at the level of work, as cleaning as an activity is outside the scope of the partnership organisations. The person employed as operations manager had run his own cleaning business and also conducted training in the cleaning industry. He delivered some of the on-the-job training.

A social support worker provides a social case management function for participants. Both English-speaking background and CALD background people who have experienced long-term unemployment have significant barriers in terms of managing work which can include:

- traumatic histories
- low level of social networks
- low literacy and numeracy skills
- substance abuse
- insecure housing.

The model was designed jointly by AMES and BSL over eight months in 2003 and began operation with twelve trainees in 2004. The cleaning sector was targeted based on the success and popularity of the insertion of a clause in the housing estate cleaning contracts requiring employment of a certain proportion of local tenants. Cleaning had shown to be a popular entry-level job for this client group.

The aim was to build a business operation that could stand alone once it was established, rather than requiring additional BSL or AMES time or resources. The two agencies initially agreed to contribute $100,000 each to an establishment fund to support the project in the implementation phase, but this money was not required.

The program is dependent on several income streams:

- government funding from Jobseeker accounts (up to $2500 per person)
- government funding from traineeship payments ($4000 for traineeship)
- government funding from STEP Group Training company
- income from cleaning contracts including BSL, AMES and other local community service agencies.

In the financial modelling, it was felt that the government contribution should be limited to a maximum 20 per cent of income, to ensure that the program did not depend too much on this source of funds. The Job Network outcome payment does not go the cleaning enterprise but is retained by to the AMES Job Network service to cover the costs of the screening process and extra support. As people are working only 15 hours per week, AMES does not receive a full outcome payment (which is dependent on the jobseeker going off benefits completely) for the initial placement into a part-time traineeship, but would be eligible when trainees move into full-time employment (which for most was around 6 months later). At this early stage the overall financial model for the program appears to be sustainable.

Although the traineeship is set at 12 months, it is effectively divided into two phases. In the first six months, the main focus is on developing generalist and specific work skills, dealing with post-placement issues and supporting the job seeker to stay in work. After six months, the job seeker is provided with job search assistance and encouraged to move into another job. Initially staff believed that participants would take 12 months to complete the certificate course, but most finished within the first 6 months and then moved into other employment. As staff left to take up other jobs, they were replaced with new trainees.

The first two cleaning contracts were for the BSL and AMES themselves. The cleaning company had to put in a competitive bid and operate the contract in the same way that other companies had. Since then, the program has taken on more commercial cleaning contracts although these are usually fairly small and often in the community sector.

Partnerships

The BSL and AMES had developed links through a staff exchange program in 2001–02 and shared an interest in employment programs for CALD people. The BSL had been using traineeships as a means to support unemployed people gain work from its earlier work with Neighbourhood Renewal in Atherton Gardens, but this did not involve a Job Network provider. Both agencies were keen to explore how this training approach could be developed with a Job Network partner.

Since neither organisation had cleaning industry knowledge, they approached two large cleaning companies to partner in the enterprise. However, the companies appeared to have difficulty with the training and transitional employment model and saw the venture as a possible competitor, so this avenue was not pursued. The BSL and AMES decided instead to establish a separate cleaning partnership and to employ an operational manager with relevant industry experience. Currently, the venture does not have a separate legal entity—staff are employed by BSL—but this is a possibility in future.

BSL has regular contact with one of the cleaning companies which have the contract in some public housing estates. This company was initially concerned that the time required to provide the support to trainees would make the project uneconomic. However, the BSL experience seems to be that this more supportive management style also has positive spin offs in that it leads to less sick days and higher retention of operational cleaning staff. The commercial company has expressed some interest in replicating the model.

Community

Most participants were identified as having significant barriers to mainstream employment and training, and some features of the program was specifically designed with this in mind.

Through its location near the Atherton Gardens public housing estate, its Neighbourhood Renewal involvement and from other programs, the BSL has established good links with residents. These links helped identify community leaders within the housing estates as contacts, so that word of mouth advertising of employment opportunities is very effective. The employment and learning coordinator position on the housing estate (funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services) has also helped establish and maintain community links.

The selection process for the positions was based on who would benefit from the training and work experience, rather than who was most capable person for the job. Some people who expressed interest had skills and experience far beyond what was required for the cleaning positions and they were streamed into other directions. This process meant the program could concentrate on those who had the most significant barriers and who would consequently benefit most. The provision of a social support worker and the part-time nature of the traineeships recognised that moving into full-time employment would represent a large jump for most people.

Employment outcomes

Of the first group of 12 trainees, 11 (90 per cent) completed the traineeship. All eleven moved into full time work, some after only six months in the job. Six moved into the cleaning industry, usually into jobs with more social interaction and favourable hours (9–5 type hours rather than late night/early morning). Most found the jobs themselves, with the assistance of the social support worker.

The other six trainees moved into other areas (such as child-care and courier work). While the program did not provide specific skills in these areas, the BSL staff believe that it gave people the confidence to move into another area, and a recent work history which improved their chances of gaining further work.

As the program expands, it is planned that some trainees may be trained to become supervisors so that they can provide mentorship and supervision for new groups. The plans for expansion are modest, however, since both agencies believe the small scale makes the initiative easier to manage and monitor.

Strengths and limitations

The cleaning enterprise seems a successful model for combining training and paid work experience in a targeted way which allows participants to move into employment. Training was completed within 6 months instead of the expected 12, and participants found jobs soon after completing 6 months, again contrasted to the 12 months envisaged. The fact that 90 per cent of trainees (admittedly out of a very small number) moved into employment despite a long history of unemployment suggests that the model is effective in assisting people overcoming significant barriers.

Other cleaning companies have shown interest in the model since the BSL experience suggests that the more intensive social support style of training results in less sick days and absenteeism. Some are considering hiring a support officer in their own companies.

Since trainees are only employed 15 hours per week, they have a chance to ‘ease into’ employment. Once they become more confident and wish to take up more work, the limit of 15 hours in the training program provides an additional incentive to move into other employment. All who have completed the program so far have gone into full-time employment.

The model should be easily replicated since the concept of combining work, training and social support in a work context is not restricted to one industry or area of work. Since there are only two partner agencies, the negotiation of partnerships and roles is less complicated than in models with far more partners.

On the other hand, there are some aspects of the program which limit how widely this could be applied. Because trainees are often unable to work early morning shifts, the model operates with cleaning taking place in afternoons only. This may limit the contracts which can be obtained at other workplaces.

The program is very dependent on the operations manager’s knowledge and experience. One way of building capacity is to try to identify new team leaders and provide training so they can taken on some of the future supervision and training. The model also relies on government funds and is therefore subject to changing policy on issues such as allocation of funds and use of jobseeker account . Finally, like all partnerships, the enterprise depends on the continuation of a good working relationship and shared goals between AMES and BSL.

3 YP[4] – the young homeless jobseekers trial

Project description

The YP[4] trial[1] aims to assist young homeless jobseekers into sustainable employment and housing. It was initiated by Hanover Welfare Services, and is conducted in partnership with Melbourne Citymission, Loddon Mallee Housing Services and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. It involves collaboration with local agencies and local, state and federal governments and operates in central Melbourne, Frankston, Bendigo and Cheltenham. The project has been established as a two-year trial of a new approach to working with this client group. This case study describes the YP[4] trial with a focus on its implementation in Bendigo by Loddon Mallee Housing Services.

The rationale for YP[4] was that homelessness services were not connected or focused enough on employment, and that current employment services were not effective for homeless clients. Joining up programs and services in a client-centred manner will, according to the trial's initiators, result in more sustainable employment and housing outcomes for young homeless jobseekers.

The key components of the YP[4] service model are:

- resourced case management
- access to a flexible pool of resources
- timely, individualised assistance
- negotiated pathways to employment, which could include mentoring, work experience, vocational training and/or subsidised employment
- stable housing for the duration of the program
- commitment to secure housing and a living wage.

In essence, YP[4] offers homeless jobseekers a single point of contact to address employment, housing, educational and personal support goals in an integrated manner over a two-year period. Funding for the trial comes from existing programs (additional funding from trusts and government sources is mostly dedicated to project management and evaluation), based on the belief that these funds can be used more effectively if better integrated. The main programs involved are:

- SAAP (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program) funding
- crisis and transitional housing (nominated places)
- Personal Support Programme
- Community Jobs Program
- Job Network
- Centrelink (assessment and referral)
- JPET (Jobs Placement, Education and Training program)

The project aims to combine funding from these sources at the agency level, and to use them more flexibly in the model described above. It therefore attempts to bring about greater program integration through pooled funding rather than partnerships between agencies, although the latter are also necessary.

[1] YP[4] refers to 'young people to the power of four'. The four powers are purpose (a job), place (a home), personal support and proof (from the trial evaluation).

Loddon Mallee Housing Services Ltd provides housing services and support programs to a wide and diverse range of people living in the Loddon Mallee Region and is also a registered training organisation. It has outlets in Kyneton, Bendigo, Kyabram, Swan Hill and Mildura. The service's catchment area covers 26 per cent of the state. The population of 283,000 people is widely dispersed and many clients are in isolated rural settings.

The agency's services are contracted predominantly by the Department of Human Services. The funding streams provide for the delivery of transitional housing management, Supported Accommodation Assistance programs, a community connections program, intensive residential care for clients with complex needs, housing support for the aged and home-based outreach support services for people with disabilities.

The homeless support team is a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funded program, providing case management to people over 20 years old who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the City of Greater Bendigo and Shire of Campaspe areas. The Homeless Support Team is funded to work with people for up to 13 weeks and aims to assist them to obtain long-term stable housing.

LMHS became involved in YP[4] because senior staff felt that their work was driven by client crises in a way which did not allow staff or clients to focus on longer term development needs, particularly related to employment. YP[4] was seen as a way of ensuring a more effective service by simultaneously lifting people out of homelessness and unemployment.

LHMS's role in YP[4] is to assist clients to overcome personal barriers and support them through mentoring whilst they are new to the workforce, so their goals can be achieved. The pilot is being run within the City of Greater Bendigo, providing case management to 60 young jobseekers over a two-year period.
[4]

Partnerships

YP[4] contains three levels of partnerships. In the establishment phase, the four community agencies joined to refine the model initiated by Hanover and agreed to cooperate in piloting the project in four different sites.

A proposal was developed on behalf of the four agencies and state and federal government agencies were then approached to discuss how the model could be implemented within the context of current policies and program funding streams. An overarching project management group has been established with representatives of the four community agencies and the key government departments (the Victorian Office of Housing, Department of Human Services, Department of Victorian Communities, and the federal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Family and Community Services and Centrelink), as well as with three peak bodies.

In each location, the partner agency attempts to integrate services by providing them itself and by establishing links with other local service providers (such as Centrelink, Job Network providers, crisis and transitional housing services and health services). An original aim of YP[4] was to improve the efficiency of service delivery by combining resources from different programs in one agency, and to reduce administration costs by streamlining reporting arrangements. This proved more difficult than anticipated and instead of having a single reporting arrangement as hoped, some programs have eight or ten different contracts and reporting requirements.

Centrelink is a key agency because they are the main referral point into the trial. Centrelink has been an enthusiastic supporter of the project, both at the local Customer Service Centre level and at the overarching management group. Referrals were initially slower than expected because the

Centrelink database is not designed to identify homelessness, and because it took some time for Centrelink staff to become familiar with the trial and referral procedures. Over time, though, referrals have increased.

LMHS works with the Lead On program which aims to expose people (usually aged 15–21) to full range of careers by engaging them in local projects. This program has been a partner to YP[4] by sourcing mentors (business or community leaders) to match with YP[4] participants with similar interests. For the YP[4] mentoring project, Lead On will form a group of older mentors, generally young professionals. The mentor meets with participants once or twice per week and acts as support to both participant and case worker (mentors are not a substitute for a case worker). This provides participants with contacts outside their immediate peer groups.

The original program model proposed that Job Network job seeker accounts or a share of outcome payments payable to Job Network members could be paid directly to YP[4]. Negotiating this has turned out to be more difficult than first envisaged. It has therefore been necessary to develop partnerships with local Job Network providers. Most Job Network providers have shown interest, and some have been particularly enthusiastic. These Job Network members are likely to work closely with YP[4] over the next two years. Partnerships with employers and Job Networks are still at early stages as there are only a small number of participants and most are not yet ready for employment. Each participant is expected to remain in the trial for up to two years, and referrals only started during the first half of 2005.

LMHS is a SAAP and transitional housing provider, so partnerships with other housing services have not been necessary. Personal support to participants is also provided through YP[4] so there has been little need to establish partnerships with local Personal Support Programme providers.

Community

Clients for the LMHS pilot of YP[4] tend to be:

- existing Loddon Mallee Housing Service clients or
- referred through Centrelink or
- identified by Loddon Mallee Housing Services intake workers and referred to Centrelink to apply.

Centrelink referral processes involve front counter staff identifying suitable clients and referring them to a Centrelink caseworker, usually a social worker, who can then place the client into YP[4] if they agree. Two caseworkers are employed by Loddon Mallee Housing Services to deliver YP4 to ‘joined up’ group members. Some clients are placed in a comparison group to enable the evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the trial.

Identification of homeless clients has posed some challenges as Centrelink records on client housing status are not always accurate. This is sometimes because people do not realise that they should provide this information to Centrelink or because jobseekers are reluctant to disclose homelessness or insecure housing as they think it might affect their employment chances.

Many young people wanting careers leave the country to go to capital cities for study or jobs. Those that do not leave often have limited options as they tend to be less skilled and have less education, and thus often remain unemployed with little connection in their community, or their ‘community’ is often a community of unemployed peers.

While rural communities are often more close knit than metropolitan areas, unemployed people may still be isolated from broader community networks. Loddon-Mallee staff feel that a lot of

unemployed young people have parents and peer groups who are also unemployed and do not have connections which lead to job opportunities. The Lead-On program attempts to overcome this by providing connections to a wider network of local people, particularly those in positions of influence in employment or organisations.

Employment outcomes

Initial informal contacts have been made with some prospective employers who have entry-level or relatively unskilled jobs. Businesses include a poultry factory, the wine industry, trucking companies and food manufacturers. Most employers have been approached in the past with similar requests.

Employers' initial reactions have been partly sceptical, perhaps due to previous experience with long-term unemployed people placed through Job Network agencies. Employers suggested that Job Network providers have not offered support to the new employee after they had received their outcome payments. This has led to early dismissal of some new employees who have not been able to perform their jobs adequately.

It was anticipated that it would take up to two years for people to move into employment; and as clients have only entered the program in the first half of 2005, it is too early to examine employment outcomes. Three YP^4 participants have been placed with employers so far—these placements have all come about through personal contacts by LMHS staff.

LMHS staff felt that employers needed to be properly briefed about the background of the participant, something that had not always happened in the past. Employers commonly commented that if they knew 'what they were getting into' they would help out and be more flexible. If someone had serious problems and this information was withheld for privacy or other reasons, the employers felt they had been misled or disadvantaged in the process. If they had been informed about these issues, they might have made a few more allowances for late starts, slow learners, anger issues and so on.

Strengths and limitations

YP^4 represents an important contrast to the current organisation of housing and employment services. Most service workers have some aspect of case management in their jobs: assessment, planning referral and coordination of service delivery. However, the proliferation of case management means that some clients now have multiple case managers, each with a coordination role. The YP^4 trial attempts to provide greater integration and efficiency by pooling resources where possible and using them in a more targeted way to address employment barriers.

YP^4 also attempts to provide a stronger link between housing services and employment. LMHS believe the SAAP system is not always effective because of a lack of affordable housing and also a lack of intensive focus on education, employment and training. This is partly because SAAP funded workers are so overwhelmed with the sheer numbers of homeless people that they have little time to deal with anything but the immediate housing crisis. YP^4 provides the scope for working with people over a longer time frame with an aim of finding a sustainable solution to homelessness through employment, and therefore avoiding the risk of focusing only on 'bandaid' short-term solutions.

Another potential advantage is that YP^4 may provide a more effective model of employment assistance for the 'hardest to place'. Job Network appears to work fairly well in getting jobseekers with few barriers into employment (or at least employment for 13 weeks). It is less successful for

disadvantaged groups, partly because the Job Network orientation and funding structure encourages immediate placement into employment rather than a longer term or developmental approach. In addition, as unemployment has declined, those with few barriers find employment more rapidly, leaving those who are the hardest to engage and with the most complex needs.

As mentioned in the first case study, the current combination of the Personal Support Programme and Job Network assumes that people with major barriers will spend time in PSP until these are resolved and then move to Job Network as 'job-ready' clients. However, in some cases, these barriers are intertwined with unemployment and cannot be resolved separately. For example, affordable housing is only available to those with adequate income from employment, or in regional areas with fewer employment opportunities. Mental health problems such as depression or lack of motivation are due in no small part to long-term unemployment itself. YP^4 allows housing, personal support and employment to be addressed simultaneously, which may make assistance more effective.

This sort of integration is however, quite time-consuming and slow. Government funding programs and accountability requirements are not easily amended to allow resource pooling, and when more than two or three programs are involved, the complexity can be overwhelming. An early indication from YP^4 is that service coordination on the ground at the local level cannot make up for fragmented policy or program design within government itself. However, the existing system, regardless of intent, does not provide very good results for many who go through it. YP^4 provides a useful model for breaking away from the limitations of vertically focused program approaches and promoting greater horizontal integration through community agencies.

4 WCIG Disability Employment Program

Project description

The fourth example describes the experience of Westgate Community Initiative Group (WCIG) Disability Employment Program in placing people with disabilities into employment. The Disability Employment Program (previously known as The Worksupply Company) is a program of Westgate Community Initiative Group (WCIG), which has 12 employment and training programs including Community Work Coordinators, Work for the Dole, Personal Support Programme, Job Network, Jobs Pathway Programme, New Apprenticeship Access Program and Managed Individual Pathways.

WCIG's approach fills a 'gap in the market' for people with disabilities. Government-funded day programs and psychiatric disability services often work with people who have the most disabling conditions. These services provide a rehabilitation orientation to assist people with daily living skills, communication, relationships and other areas of functioning, but do not necessarily focus on employment. Disability employment services are most able to assist people who are 'job-ready', i.e. whose conditions are stabilised and who have a good level of functioning. In between, there are people who might still attend a day centre but who want to work, and who may only develop work skills by actually engaging in a job. There are presently few options for this group, and these are the people WCIG is attempting to support with its transitional employment program and social firms.

WCIG is an employment service which assists people with a physical, sensory or psychiatric disability to obtain and maintain open employment. It has been running for over 11 years, building and strengthening relationships between employers, the unemployed and the local community. It is currently funded through the disability open employment program of the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

While the general target group includes people with various disabilities, WCIG specialises in working with those with psychiatric disabilities. About two-thirds of its caseload are people with severe mental health problems, and the remaining third have sensory disabilities (mostly hearing impairment).

WCIG's program shares features of other disability open employment programs. Case managers are responsible for assessment, planning and ongoing contact with clients. Each case worker normally has 30–35 clients, and provides assistance with job seeking in the open employment market. This includes personal support, job readiness training, identifying job vacancies and resources, confidence building, employment placement and ongoing support after employment placement. Separate marketing staff develop links with employers and identify suitable job vacancies.

About 50 per cent of clients find employment through this program, but a large group of people with severe mental illness find it difficult to secure ongoing open employment. This led WCIG to develop the 'supported transitional employment' program. Originally established as a separate program, called the Onsite Employment Program, in recent years this has been amalgamated into the WCIG model.

The supported transitional employment program aims to provide more direct work experience and on-the-job training. WCIG approaches employers to fill one entry-level full time position with five clients in a job share arrangement. Each client works one day per work for three to six months. A

full-time support worker also works on site to support clients. The case manager continues to work with the clients in looking for open employment.

Currently, clients are placed with a cardboard carton manufacturer in the western suburbs, a restaurant in Federation Square, a shopping centre and a cleaning company. WCIG guarantees that the positions will always be filled. Backup workers are available if someone is sick or otherwise unable to work, and in the rare event that no clients are available, the support workers themselves spend the day doing the work instead.

This model allows people who become ill to take time off if they need to and still have a job to come back to. This is particularly important for people with episodic mental illness, often exacerbated in times of stress, as it means they can focus on their health without having the additional worry of losing their jobs.

WCIG are also engaged in developing a 'social firm': a business that engages in market activity and where a proportion of the employees (perhaps 40 per cent) would be clients of WCIG and the balance of the staff would be experienced industry workers as in any other similar enterprise. WCIG is looking at the possibility of developing a cleaning business as a social firm, from another enterprise currently cleaning six offices. This will partly depend on being able to buy another business if capital can be raised. Positions in the 'social firm' would be long-term permanent positions, not transitional.

The purpose of a social firm is to create employment opportunities and a degree of integration for people with disabilities. It is not intended to be a purely transitional arrangement, although people may over time move to other jobs. Support for the workers with a mental illness will be provided by the WCIG staff and also by the business's overall supportive culture.

Partnerships

WCIG receives referrals from psychiatric disability services and clinical mental health services. The Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria has two 'clubhouse' or drop-in day programs in the local area. WCIG have funded a worker in both the clubhouses twice per week to maintain an employment focus, provide some training and assist with referrals. Having the staff member employed by the clubhouses integrates the employment focus into other aspects of the program, and means the worker is part of the service team, not someone who drops in from another agency. This has been a good tool for assessing which participants might be ready for employment programs, and for helping them move towards job-readiness.

There is also a WCIG worker based at the local community mental health service one afternoon per week to be able to see clients directly, and to maintain links with clinical staff. WSC receives few referrals from local Job Network providers. The WCIG Disability Employment Program manager, Michael Dunphy, believes that this is because the star rating system discourages them from referring clients to other agencies once they have been listed with a particular Job Network provider.

The relationship with the Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria has been going for six or seven years. It has become more service delivery oriented over the last two years, with the funded support worker at each clubhouse two days per week. Clients are referred between agencies depending on their needs.

Employers in the supported transitional employment program are mostly found through personal contacts. A full time marketer approaches employers, and although finding supportive employers

has been difficult, WCIG has secured two new transitional work sites by this method in the last year.

Community

WCIG assists the most disadvantaged jobseekers in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Some 30 per cent of WCIG's clients are on Newstart Allowance and the rest are on Disability Support Pension. Most clients are referred by other services or Centrelink.

In this service, 'community' is the community of people with a mental illness The Mental Illness Fellowship employment worker employed in the clubhouse program has been a way of contacting clients who may be interested in work and referring them into WCIG programs.. Clubhouse programs provide an opportunity for socialisation and other activities for people who might be, or feel, excluded from other local activities.

Case managers in the WCIG disability employment program are sometimes uncertain about a person's capacity to work, and whether they should participate in pre-job training, the supported transitional employment program, the open employment market, or none of these. In these situations, they may refer clients to the day program, where the employment worker can spend more time with them to assess how they function in the clubhouse environment and their ability to undertake activities around the centre.

The employers involved normally have some kind of community connection and are interested in helping disadvantaged people or contributing to the local community. They tend to be small family companies, rather than large national companies. Unfortunately, larger companies seem reluctant to participate, even though they have more resources and human resource management processes which would support this type of program.

Employment outcomes

While some WCIG clients are only able to work in entry-level jobs, other highly skilled workers with disabilities return to work at a lower skill level then get back up to their original skill level with support. For this reason, WCIG often targets entry-level jobs. The supported transitional employment program places clients in low-skilled entry-level jobs, which have included trolley collecting at a supermarket, cleaning, food preparation, working in fast-food outlets and a large bakery and warehouse work. WCIG has been negotiating with the Department of Victorian Communities to place some in a low-level administrative position, although this has not yet come to fruition. An aim is for people to be able to move on to other roles within these organisations once they have gained experience and confidence.

WCIG estimates that 50 per cent of its clients gain some form of employment from its general case management/open employment program. Some others (currently 10–15 per cent) are placed in one of the supported employment positions, and around half of these are successful in moving into further employment. With more transitional employment places and supportive employers to assist the more difficult client group, the WCIG Disability Employment Program manager, Michael Dunphy believes the overall success rate could grow from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. The main limiting factor is finding employers willing to establish placements.

The WCIG manager is concerned that changes to funding arrangements may compromise its ability to work with people with the greatest barriers to employment. The funding structure for disability employment programs is being revised by DEWR and it seems likely to become more similar to that for Job Network providers, with outcome payments and monitoring. This model may force all

disability providers to work only with those people easiest to place. People further away from employment might have been taken on previously but in future may be given less attention since services will not be able to afford to work intensively with them. This may compromise WCIG's goal of helping the most disadvantaged jobseekers.

Strengths and limitations

The approach to employment developed by WCIG has some novel features. The partnership with Mental Illness Fellowship clubhouses enables staff to assess the clients' capacity and interest in employment over a longer time frame and in a more natural setting than formal office interviews. This means staff can link clients to the most appropriate source of assistance.

The supported transitional employment program provides valuable experience in a real job with appropriate support, and also pays full award wages. It allows participants to gain confidence in the workplace, learn work skills and demonstrate to prospective employers that they are able to hold down a job.

The temporary nature of the placement encourages people to continue job search at the same time as developing skills. This may reduce the 'lock-in' effect of labour market programs in which participants tend to look for work less intensively while they are taking part.

In addition, the part-time work experience provides a more graduated entry into employment than attempting a full-time job. This appears important for people who have been out of work for a long time.

One limitation of the transitional employment approach is that employers must take on five or more part-time workers for a full-time position. They therefore incur additional administration expenses involved in hiring multiple employees who are replaced regularly. On the other hand, the WCIG guarantee of providing a worker in the job every day reduces costs and production down time due to a worker's absence. Still, finding supportive employers who have appropriate positions and are willing to take groups of people with a mental illness is the most difficult aspect of setting up transitional employment options.

The unusual nature of the onsite support worker position also poses some challenges. As well as having the professional skills to support people with mental illnesses, the worker must be trained in the actual job (e.g. cardboard box making) and be willing to back-fill if no-one else is available when the rostered worker is unable to attend. This means that it is more difficult to recruit to this position.

Setting up and running the supported transitional work program is more expensive that the usual services provided, as is setting up a social firm. While these options appear to fill a gap in existing service provision, it is difficult to resource them from existing program funding. Changes to the funding of disability employment programs could reinforce these difficulties unless there is some recognition of the differences and strengths of these approaches.

Finally, the employment barriers facing people with mental illnesses should not be underestimated. People seeking work in the open employment market find that disclosing their illness can lead to rejection out of hand, but not disclosing means that if they get the job, it can be difficult to manage relapses. They may receive post-placement support from caseworkers after they are employed, but no support by their employer, who may interpret absence or communication difficulties simply as inability to perform the job.

5 Summary and reflections

These projects demonstrate interesting and innovative strategies which appear to help overcome barriers for disadvantaged jobseekers in a way which other programs do not. As such they provide useful directions for future policy development and research. Some general themes from the four programs are discussed below.

Dealing with complexity

People using the services described here often have a complex combination of barriers to employment. These may include low levels of education, lack of formal qualifications, long-term health problems including unpredictable episodic conditions (such as mental illness), poor English skills or a lack of knowledge of Australian workplace conditions, peer groups with no connection to jobs and little formal work experience. They may also have little confidence in their ability to find employment or the capacity of employment services to help them meet this goal. This complexity requires a more sophisticated understanding of the connection between different barriers and an ability to deal with them together rather than separately, which is usually the approach taken (e.g. mental health problems dealt with by one service, training by another, employment assistance by another, etc.). This is most effectively done at the local level by agencies either providing a more 'holistic' approach themselves or by developing partnerships to allow better linking between types of support.

Relationship with community

Community connections happen in varying ways. Formal referral processes for service delivery are a feature of all programs, but importance of informal contacts and networks is clear. In particular, the importance of developing trust and credibility is paramount. This can be seen in the way in which word of mouth information spreads quickly about how an agency is perceived or about opportunities for jobs. The community development approach used on housing estates is another example of building community connections, here used with a conscious orientation towards employment (based on residents expressed priorities).

The need for investment

Approaches such as those documented in this report are not cheap. These four programs use a developmental or investment approach which requires a higher level of funding over a longer period of time than provided by most current funding. They are designed on the premise that long-term unemployed people need work experience to learn general employment skills and expectations, establish a routine, and establish a recent work history. People also need specific skill development, in some cases through traineeships, in other cases through work experience. This could be contrasted to the Job Network model which is focused on placement in employment as soon as possible: this seems to suit many jobseekers but not the long-term unemployed. Anecdotally, it is known that Job Network members use some of these strategies but there is no systematic information about what practices they are undertaking. Paying subsidies to employers to take on clients appears to be a common practice, although this could be simply 'buying' a position for someone who would have got work anyway in order to get an outcome payment, rather than being targeted at the most disadvantaged jobseekers.

While greater investment is necessary for the most disadvantaged jobseekers, some of the results in these programs suggest that in the long term, this investment may be more cost effective than the alternatives. Without this sort of assistance, many job seekers would simply not get back into employment, and remain reliant on social security payments for subsistence, or cycling through short-term casual jobs on and off payments.

Intermediate labour markets

Three of the four examples use an 'intermediate labour market' (ILM) model to provide a transition between unemployment and open employment, focused mainly on training, work experience and personal support. Intermediate labour markets aim to reduce the risk and cost to employers of taking on someone without a recent record of good work habits. In two examples (Neighbourhood Renewal and the AMES/BSL cleaning partnership), the BSL group training company STEP acted as the intermediary by employing people as trainees for a limited time. In the WCIG example, participants were placed in private companies with substantial support from WSC, with the intention that they would move on after three months. ILMs deserve much further policy consideration and program support; and since GTOs exist across the country, they form an existing institutional base.

Another notable feature is that work experience and training were often both part-time and temporary. Part-time work experience allowed people to move into work more gradually than a full-time job, and to develop skills and confidence, but then also provided an incentive to move into other employment (since it was not possible to increase hours in the program). Limiting the training or work experience period, along with support to move into other employment, seemed to help reduce the 'lock-in' effect of programs which may delay job search and entry into other employment.

Partnerships

Partnerships between agencies and across sectors are often promoted by policy makers and community agencies. However, some partnerships appear more viable than others. YP[4] attempts to join up a wide range of services and government programs. In the early stages of implementation, it is clear that this integration is extremely difficult. One reason is that, despite support from different levels of Victorian and Commonwealth government, the structure of government departments, program delivery and funding streams are still inflexible in ways which cannot be overcome at the agency level. On the other hand, partnerships of just two or three programs (such as the AMES/BSL attempt to join Job Network services with traineeships and group training organisations) seem far more viable if also more limited in scope.

Employer involvement

All four projects aim to equip people to gain employment in the open labour market, but each has experienced some difficulties in engaging private employers, despite some examples to the contrary. Employers seem happy to take people on at the end of the process, once participants have shown they have the skills and experience necessary. However it is more difficult to involve employers more directly in the ILM process (e.g. as a host employer while someone develops on the job skills). It may be that community agencies do not have sufficient links to large local employers, or that employers have been able to meet their recruiting needs without having to participate in these types of programs.

It is clear that for employers, ILMs play an important role in getting long-term unemployed people to the level of job readiness that they require. While it might be preferable to involve employers earlier in the process, this will take quite a lot of hard work. The most effective way of selling these programs to employers is to be clear about the barriers facing individuals, but to ensure that appropriate supports are available so that employers are not left to themselves once someone has been placed. Employer subsidies of two different forms may also help: first, subsidies to provide work experience for people who have little experience in the industry (on the basis that the placement is only temporary); and second, a subsidy to take on a long-term unemployed person, conditional on the job being ongoing rather than a temporary placement. Regardless of these subsidies, ILMs will rely mostly on community agencies providing the support and in many cases, the work experience and training, so the agencies need to be adequately resourced to do this job.

Some other features of these programs should be attractive to employers. In some areas, employers report difficulty in filling vacancies with sufficiently skilled and experienced staff. These models, especially those that involved ILMs, have the capacity to provide jobseekers with the skills to fill these vacancies. Such models might act as ‘feeder’ programs for specific industries, which might be facilitated by contacts with peak industry bodies. If the rate of unemployment continues to fall, employers may be forced to consider these options anyway, since people remaining out of work are likely to have more barriers to be addressed. Apart from assisting with recruiting, some models may also save employer costs by reducing staff turnover or downtime from absences.

Further study into these possible impacts might be useful in developing the business case for greater investment in such programs. The present overview suggests they offer benefits for employers (by improving the quality of the labour force and efficiency of the labour market), for governments (by contributing to economic growth) and, most importantly, for unemployed people who can meet their goals of gaining sustainable employment.