

**SUBMISSION TO
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE
RELATIONS**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLIAMENT HOUSE

CANBERRA ACT 2600

**EMPLOYMENT: INCREASING PARTICIPATION
IN PAID WORK**

Prepared by:

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

East Coast Apprenticeships is an incorporated not-for-profit community organisation with considerable expertise in the development, implementation and evaluation of training and employment initiatives. The organisation is managed and administered by a Board of Directors, Chief Executive Officer and thirty-five staff. The organisation has been in operation for fifteen years and carries a high profile and credibility within the community and with the stakeholders it is involved with, which include government, non-government, community organisations, employers and clients (jobseekers, apprentices, trainees, general public).

Charter

East Coast values teamwork, responsiveness, continuous improvement, ethics and openness. We:

- place honesty, integrity and respect for others above all
- display diligence, professionalism and probity
- pursue productivity, team work and best practice
- make effective and economical use of company resources
- promote the interests and development of our people
- seek to help others and to provide community service

Mission Statement

“To excel in the management of employment and training”

Activities:

Group Training - The organisation’s core business activities are Group Training of Apprentices and Trainees. We also participate in the Housing Industry Trade Training (HITT) Scheme and provide Employment Services to jobseekers. Under our Group Training Scheme, we employ apprentices and trainees and then place them with host employers from various industries. Our organisation presently employs 480 apprentices and trainees, with our employer network consisting of approximately 350 active employers.

East Coast is also a registered building company constructing low and medium density housing for the Queensland Department of housing under the Housing Industry Trade Training (HITT) program.¹ We have specialised over the last four years building and renovating housing for the disabled, and we also offer newstart apprenticeships in the building industry. East Coast Apprenticeships has commenced a program of offering to undertake home renovations for the disabled as a replacement of the very successful HITT Program, allowing us to continue to contribute to apprenticeship training.

Employment Services – East Coast Apprenticeships has been a most active partner in the State Government’s *Breaking The Unemployment Cycle Initiative*. Over the last three years, East Coast Apprenticeships has managed more than 25 programs under this initiative. These programs ran from our offices at Strathpine, Redcliffe and Maroochydore. At present, we are engaged in two programs offering training to unemployed and employment support to move into the aged care industry (45 students) and a community organization support program training 20 students to contribute to community service for ten diverse community organizations and encouraging graduates into sustainable employment.

¹ The Queensland State Government has terminated this most successful industry-training program in June 2003.

Structured Training Employment Programs (STEP) (DEWSRB) – This is an ongoing program run by Department of Employment, Work Relations and Small Business, which aims to provide structured training and placement services for Indigenous Australian job seekers. Vocational training has included plant operators and security officer's training courses. We have successfully helped over 100 Indigenous Australians through our STEP-I program and are currently engaged in a STEP-II Program with a further 50 people.

AIM

The aim of this submission is to present to the Committee some views on the significant potential of increased participation in paid work currently suppressed by historical attitudes, practices and inhibiting government policies.

SCOPE

It is intended to discuss two opportunities only. Firstly, the significant potential offered with the increasing demands of the aged care industry and, the secondly the restricted take-up of trade training and skilling requirements of our nation.

AGED CARE

Currently, East Coast Apprenticeships is finalizing a Federal Research Paper on *An Industry Training Strategy* for Aged Care requirements. An aspect of this study is the identification of the significant volunteer pool currently engaged in the aged care industry. Figures suggest that out of 500,000+ some 276,000+ contributors are volunteers. Many support community and home care, an area promoted by Governments to increase the length of stay in one's own home before seeking residential care.

The potential growth of community and home care requirements have not been quantified but in view of data on our aging population, this element of potential workforce will become considerable, given its current size. It is evident that the growth of the aged care industry over the next few decades will see it become the largest single industry in the nation challenging economics, employment and social needs.

It is suggested that this rapidly expanding industry is unique in a number of ways. The extensive and growing use of volunteers to provide essential services and the compassion and caring of an aging population is unique. The lack of a recognisable robust industry framework including procedures and practices that can accommodate growth and change is unique. While there are other unique features not relevant to the matter at hand, what is relevant is that *this industry presents considerable potential to increase participation in the paid work force*. It would be naive to ignore this growing volunteer pool in this debate.

Firstly, many in the volunteer pool can be a prime source for the increasing demand for paid workers in the industry as this massive expansion continues. Secondly, many home carers are gaining skills and experiences that would simplify transition into the aged care industry workplace beyond their immediate and perhaps family focused caring role. I.e. After the passage of loved ones to residential care and beyond, carers could move into paid employment in the aged care industry.

It is suggested that if the home and personal carer's training to care at home for loved ones was structured and accredited towards the potential of a later career in aged care, it would contribute to the very industry that is pressuring greater participation. This could be taken a step further by considering a framework where *Carers Allowances* were linked to the acquisition of this accredited training. This legitimizing and accreditation of current practice would increase self-esteem and the quality of home care while collaterally preparing a career path for many engaged in this practice.

Summary: It is proposed that the aged care volunteer pool currently existing and the anticipated growth of this pool be considered as a major contributor to expanding the paid work force.

TRADE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANSION

It is incredible that the nation's requirements for trade training in all the traditional industry roles are in practice generally recruited from Australians between the age of 18 and 20. This restricted three-year window is driven by the necessity to have a licence and vehicle for mobility in most cases and secondly the imposition of the adult wage is an inhibitor for employers. In construction for example, the adult wage can add an additional \$200+ per week over an apprentice who is 18-20 years.

Statistics demonstrate that for several years now there is a significant shortfall in the takeup of most trades and in particular the building and construction industry.

It is proposed that by increasing the recruitment age for the commencement of apprenticeships to 25 years, significant new opportunities for commencements in paid employment would be generated. This matter has industrial relations implications but the precedent of recognizing fulltime students to age 25 exists for other allowances, why not for paid employment as an apprentice? The union argument that adults cannot live on an apprentices' wage should be considered in line with university students' living requirements **and** the imposition of HECS!

Summary: It is proposed that the age limits to apprenticeships accommodate standard entry up to age 25.

CONCLUSION

Only two aspects of this unique opportunity to increase participation in the workforce have been presented. I have not discussed the important role for school leavers and the preparation requirements emphasizing the *Choice of Career Pathways* and the lack of relevant support functions defining opportunity, capability and ambition for young Australians. This historical "*missing step*" has compounded the social disruptions of final years of schooling, joining the workforce or abandoning it and costs our nation billions of dollars each year on unnecessary and inappropriate training for so many at the expense of providing quality training to those who need it most.

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