

Change Centrelink's Activity Test

While in many cases unemployed people want or need certain Centrelink supervision, in the case of an individual who would CHOOSE to do community work for an organisation that has itself already been approved, three current restrictions are inappropriate and unnecessary.

- i) community work is only allowed if it can be shown that it is likely to lead to paid employment or if the individual can satisfy the case manager that it will improve their employability;
- ii) approval is only given for a limited time.
- iii) those wanting to do community work for an approved organisation must have a third party (either Centrelink or its agent) to individually approve and "case manage" their activity;

To understand why these restrictions should be scrapped, it is helpful to see unemployed people in three groups.

The three groups are:

1. Those who will not quickly find employment, and will not choose community work.

Appropriate Centrelink intervention is needed for people in this group, but because they will not choose community work, any community work restrictions are irrelevant for them.

2. The majority, who are keen to find employment and do so within 3 months. From within this group, some may wish to do community work. They may see it as a pathway to the job and the income they want, or perhaps as a way of staying productive.

The three Centrelink restrictions are superfluous for this group because these people return to employment quickly through their own initiative.

3. Those who will not quickly find employment, but would choose to do community work.

The three restrictions i), ii) & iii) mentioned above, are inappropriate for this group because -

- the incentive of a higher income will, by itself, see most of these people back into employment as soon as they can get it;
- the current restrictions discount the value of continued community work, and a person's autonomy and self-motivation are discouraged.

- even if employment is not on the horizon, continuing with community work will still mean unemployment being a more productive experience, particularly for those people having trouble finding work in today's highly competitive labour market;
- developing new skills and staying active in the workplace increases employment potential;
- the fact that someone has chosen to do 32 hours of community work in a fortnight should be evidence enough that they are strongly motivated and keen to participate;

Community work should be a standard option on the fortnightly claim form. The random phone check, which Centrelink now uses in an attempt to verify job applications to employers, would verify with certainty claims of community work with organisations without any need for Centrelink involvement in arrangements between the volunteer and the organisation.

If a person who had chosen community work decided not to continue, they would simply tick a different box on the form. This would indicate that they had been doing some other approved activity, such as study or job search.

This simple change would also help create abundant sustainable work in which people could learn to build social housing & grow their own food

ATTACHMENTS 1. & 2.

Attachment 1

With globalisation both employment and UNemployment will be distributed more evenly around the world and, until the population of our own region is much more evenly distributed & the standard of living is better balanced, people will continue to be pushed & pulled to Australia.

I don't believe there is anything civilized that can be done to stop increasing numbers of people wanting to come here. If I was facing a lifetime of danger or poverty I would gladly risk my life for a chance to be here.

Our desperation to protect our borders shows just how convinced many Australians are that our way of life is threatened by the cost of such inflows. Whatever the benefit that immigration may bring, they fear massive job and housing pressures & a blowout in welfare.

In our desperation, even work for the dole has been proposed as a deterrent to asylum seekers and as an offset to costs of dealing with them. Of course this disregards how counter-productive and costly work for the dole has already proven to be.

Instead I would like to propose that the poor, including refugees and unemployed, should be welcomed to choose (or reject) voluntary community work.

With TAFE Outreach support, one of their choices should be to help build suburban public housing, involving choices from bookwork to labouring. The building should start from a community room providing facilities and interim accommodation for all.

A food garden should supplement Centerlink's payments.

In essence, the current arrangements under which over 55's can to choose 15hrs/wk work for approved community organisations to satisfy mutual obligations should be an option for all.

Because this would not involve coercion & would provide food, housing security and social integration, it would be much more effective & attractive than the work for the dole proposals gaining in support. It would not only provide valuable work but would lay the foundations for the sustainable development which we all need to support.

For more detail please see -

<http://ntw.net46.net/NTWmodel/NTWModeloverview.htm>

Attachment 2

A Neighbourhood That Works (NTW)

The current mortgage/ rental situation has work and lifestyle implications that don't leave much energy for the neighbourhood.

However, with the sort of rental security that public housing tenants have and with the supports being developed by NTW, a vibrant, productive, inclusive and sustainable neighbourhood culture could be encouraged. We could have 'neighbourhoods that work!'

Neighbourhood participation could provide a valid role and build new skills. For those who need such arrangements, participation should be counted as an approved Centrelink work experience or voluntary work activity (this is already an option for over 55's). It is important to keep in mind however, that free and willing participation can be supported and encouraged, but should not be mandated.

The potential is also there for neighbourhood participation to reach a level of productivity and accountability to warrant the payment of a small income. This type of work

opportunity is likely to become very important as more and more market employment is specialised and centralised in cities.

NTW in Public Housing

In the midst of two public housing estates in Hope Street in the Blue Mountains just west of Sydney, neighbours are starting to use the supports devised by NTW.

A food garden, a car pool, an ornamental beautification program and some social events have all taken place.

As at Hope Street, public housing estates represent a great opportunity for NTW participation because tenants have the sort of housing security needed, as well as the incentive to improve their situation in a new more local and cooperative way.

NTW seeks to translate whatever the natural energy that different neighbours have into a sustaining, vibrant and truly viable neighbourhood that works.

NTW could also progress 'by design', even more deliberately than through the 'evolutionary' process happening at Hope Street.

Neighbourhood participation has been shown to dramatically improve the safety, vibrancy and general well-being of all sorts of communities.

If such important outcomes could be achieved with little to no extra cost and within existing government requirements, investment in secure and affordable rental housing could become much more attractive for government and private developers.