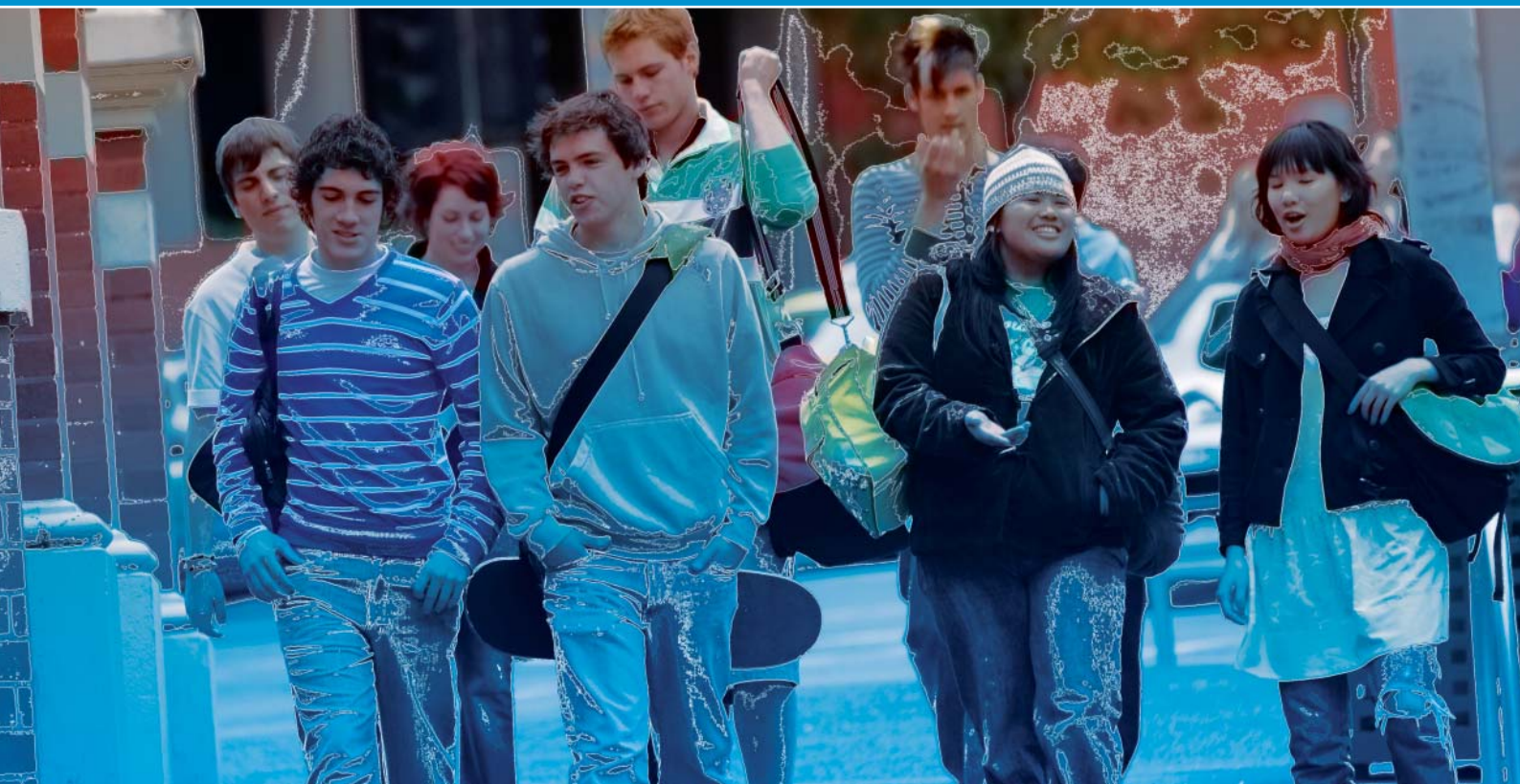


Still looking for a break

Welfare to Work—So what's changed?

Lucinda Jordan & Michael Horn
Research and Social Policy Unit,
Melbourne Citymission

August 2007



Melbourne Citymission
Building Inclusive Communities

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Melbourne Citymission

Established by the city churches of Melbourne in 1854, Melbourne Citymission initially employed six missionaries to work alongside people living in poverty and struggling to survive in tent cities that sprung up along the Yarra River during the Victorian Gold Rush.

One hundred and fifty one years after its establishment, Melbourne Citymission continues to give people a 'hand up not a hand out' and aims to build inclusive communities that overcome disadvantage.

Melbourne Citymission seeks to take a lead role in creating an environment in which people can build inclusive, resourceful communities, where opportunity and fairness are embraced as a way of life. To do this, we provide resources and choices to those who are marginalised and living with disadvantage as well as delivering services that respect the rights of individuals and embrace diversity.

Melbourne Citymission currently provides over 60 different programs to thousands of Victorians of many faiths and cultures. Our programs are delivered in six major service areas: Children, Youth, Adult and Family Services; Disability Services; Employment, Education and Training Services; Homeless Persons Services; Aged Care and Palliative Care.

Melbourne Citymission's vision is for a fair and just community where people have equal access to opportunities and resources.

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Executive Summary

In 2006 Melbourne Citymission published “Give me a break! Welfare to work, a lost opportunity” which documented the experiences of Melbourne Citymission clients before the Welfare to Work reforms were implemented in July 2006. Melbourne Citymission was concerned that the Welfare to Work reforms would further marginalise disadvantaged jobseekers. The current study seeks to monitor the impacts of the reforms since their introduction.

The report documents the findings from a survey of 172 clients and from a series of case studies collected from across the organisation. As with the previous year’s study, participants involved in the survey represent some of the most marginalised jobseekers, for whom the Welfare to Work reforms have had particular implications. One third of all participants had been in their current housing for less than one month at the time of the survey, and over a third indicated that the last time they had a home was longer than a year ago. Almost half of all participants had left school either at or before year 10, and one in four participants had never had any work experience. The most common barriers reported by participants to finding and maintaining work was a lack of experience and insecure housing.

Participants reported that they experienced difficulties affording basic living necessities, as well as employment, education and training costs. Most participants were currently receiving income support from Centrelink, and of these, half had their income reduced at some stage in the past year as a result of an overpayment or loan. A significant proportion indicated that repayments had resulted in considerable hardship and they struggled to pay for basics such as rent and food.

One in five participants in receipt of income assistance had been issued with at least one Participation Failure notice at some stage over the past year. Of these clients, over half had been in their current housing for less than a month. A similar proportion reported that their payments had actually been stopped at some stage in the past 12 months. As with the previous study, the majority of participants reported that having their payments stopped had a significant impact on their ability to afford necessities such as food and housing. Two thirds indicated that the breach had a significant impact on their health. Over a third reported that the breach had a significant impact on their ability to look for or participate in work, education or training.

Case studies collected as part of the research illustrate the significant and complex issues experienced by many jobseekers accessing Melbourne Citymission’s services. They also highlight the increasing pressures on support workers as they assist their clients to negotiate an increasingly complex and confusing system. A necessity now exists within the current system for disadvantaged jobseekers to have skilled advocates that are able to ensure problems are rectified as they arise. **The system as it currently stands does not provide the necessary safeguards to ensure disadvantaged jobseekers are treated fairly and appropriately.**

Melbourne Citymission continues to argue that the current approach to welfare reform fails the test of fairness, morality or efficacy. We are concerned that the Welfare to Work system and associated compliance regime is in fact preventing disadvantaged jobseekers from moving into sustainable employment. A more effective employment assistance system must be predicated on an acknowledgement of the aspirations and hopes held by most jobseekers to make a better life for themselves and their families. This should include adequate and effective assessment of barriers to employment and the provision of integrated assistance, adequate income support and an effective and fair welfare system.

The report makes the following set of recommendations to Federal and State Governments:

1. Effective engagement and assessment of barriers to employment
 - 1.1 **Review the Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) process to ensure that vulnerable customers are effectively engaged, assessed and referred.** Clients must be encouraged to fully disclose barriers to employment, to assist Centrelink to make effective referrals to the most appropriate assistance. The assessment process must ensure that vulnerable clients are supported to gather all necessary documentation and that follow up is provided if additional documentation can be gathered.
 - 1.2 **Ensure JCA assessors have the appropriate skills and experience to engage with vulnerable clients and are able to conduct a full and comprehensive assessment of their barriers and personal issues.**
 - 1.3 **Situate all JCAs at Centrelink sites to ensure assessments are accessible for transient and vulnerable clients.**
2. Provision of adequate income support to meet basic needs and to assist employment, education and training transitions
 - 2.1 **Increase Newstart and Youth Allowance income support to ensure disadvantaged jobseekers are able to meet basic needs.**
 - 2.2 **Review the Commonwealth Rent Assistance allowance to ensure jobseekers in private rental have sufficient resources after housing costs, to participate in training and job search activities.**
3. Ensuring Welfare to Work reforms are effective and fair
 - 3.1 **Abolish the current compliance framework and “serious participation failure” of 8 weeks non-payment of income support for disadvantaged jobseekers, as fundamentally inconsistent with the right of all households to adequate income to meet basic needs.** Any assessment of a participation failure must take into account the circumstances surrounding the failure, including significant vulnerabilities such as homelessness.
 - 3.2 **Ensure young people are eligible for financial case management if their payments are suspended.**
 - 3.3 **Uncap the Personal Support Program (PSP) and eliminate waiting lists to enable eligible clients to commence participation immediately (rapid referral), as applies to the Job Network.**
 - 3.4 **Resource the PSP and Job Placement Employment & Training (JPET) programs for brokerage to an equivalent level as available through the Jobseeker Account for Job Network clients.**
 - 3.5 **Ensure that vulnerable jobseekers engaged in support programs such as JPET and PSP are not required to register with a Job Network provider until assessed as ready for open employment by their support worker.**
 - 3.6 **Review the performance requirements on PSP providers to ensure that social outcomes are of equal weighting to employment outcomes.**

4. Integrated assistance to achieve sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers
 - 4.1 **Conduct a comprehensive review of the current employment assistance system, including a rigorous evaluation of the Job Network.** Bring to an end the continuous modifications and additions to the system in the absence of considered evidence based policy making.
 - 4.2 **Address the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged jobseekers by making welfare support simpler and more efficient.** Develop and implement a customised support program for those with significant barriers to work, adopting the principles of joined-up case management, with adequate resources to deliver a coordinated suite of training, work experience, health and welfare support.
 - 4.3 **Review the allocation of funds across the range of targeted programs (eg. Job Network, PSP, JPET) and ensure resources equitably match the level and extent of barriers faced by individual jobseekers.**
 - 4.4 **Implement substantive housing policy reform to increase the supply of low cost housing for disadvantaged job seekers.** This requires collaboration between the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments with the housing industry. Resources to enable 'joined-up' models of assistance that include transitional housing should be included.
5. Participation in education, training and skills development
 - 5.1 **Introduce measures to ensure all fees and charges at public education institutions (schools and TAFE) are waived for disadvantaged students to enable implementation of the Victorian Government's commitment to ensuring full participation of disengaged people in learning.**
 - 5.2 **Provide free public transport to all full time students from disadvantaged backgrounds at secondary and post secondary education institutions.**
 - 5.3 **Increase the availability of affordable childcare to enable sole parents facing financial disadvantage to access training opportunities.**
 - 5.4 **Ensure courses offered in existing secondary and tertiary learning facilities remain relevant to employment opportunities at the local community level.** This should also include a review of the criteria for apprenticeships to ensure they relate more closely to core competencies for particular occupations, and thereby open up participation to more disadvantaged job seekers. Incentives should also be provided to encourage employers to offer apprenticeships to young adults aged 21–30 years.
 - 5.5 **Reapply funding taken from the Workforce Participation Partnership program to initiatives that ensure disadvantaged jobseekers are provided with pre-employment support and work opportunities in their local communities.**
6. Providing employment opportunities for the long term unemployed
 - 6.1 **Invest in transitional employment programs with subsidised work opportunities relevant to sustainable employment for the long term unemployed who have spent two spells in the Job Network (Intensive Support Customised Assistance).**
 - 6.2 **Increase the proportion of disadvantaged jobseekers in the public and community sector workforce, by setting achievable targets.**

Melbourne Citymission Services

Melbourne Citymission provides a wide range of services and support for people who are facing disadvantage and social exclusion in Melbourne. Programs provided cover the full life course from children and family services, disability services, aged care and palliative care.

A long term focus on employment, education and training has been established over time in response to the level of unmet needs in the community and the barriers which discourage or preclude young people and adults from actively participating in learning and skills development matched to their capacities and aspirations.

Melbourne Citymission provides a large array of programs focused on assisting clients' transitions to social and economic participation. These include:

- Jobs Placement Employment and Training (JPET)
- A tutoring program for young people at risk of early school leaving
- Slingshot Community Enterprise and Employment Centre (SCEEC) providing a creative mix of education and training, job generation and creative activities with a focus on small business start-ups
- Personal Support Program (PSP)
- Western and Gateway Reconnect which provides support and mediation for 12-18 year olds who have recently left home or are at risk of becoming homeless
- Youth Employment, Education & Training Initiative (YEETI) which provides an integrated package of housing and vocational assistance to strengthen pathways for homeless young people
- Horn of Africa Young People's Pathway Project which assists young people and families understand and engage in employment activities
- MYSS (Melbourne Youth Support Service) a state-wide telephone and information service for accommodation and support
- Step Ahead (formerly YTM) offers a case management approach with continuity of support across housing, health and employment for 16-25 year olds
- YP4 is a trial of joined-up services for marginalised adults aged 18-35 years experiencing homelessness and unemployment
- Young and Pregnant Parents (YAPP) provides young families with support during pregnancy and parenting to ensure transitions to social and economic participation
- Women 4 Work assists women exiting prison or on community based orders to obtain and maintain employment
- and the Women's Integrated Support Program (WISP) assists women exiting prison with housing and support needs as they transition back into the community.

The range of services and programs offered by Melbourne Citymission are underpinned by the key principles of:

- engagement of the individual as a basis for assessment of needs and experiences,
- continuity of support through a strengths approach to case based practice, and
- providing an integrated suite of assistance and resources matched to individual goals.

1. Introduction

The past decade has seen an increasingly harsh and punitive approach to welfare reform adopted by the Commonwealth Government. Under this approach, jobseekers are penalised through payment suspensions for failing to meet mutual obligation requirements, often with little consideration for the context of the failure. Despite a lack of evidence supporting the use of active participation measures to produce meaningful transitions to work, reforms have continued to extend the principle of mutual obligation to additional categories of income support recipients. In July 2006 through the Welfare to Work reforms this was extended to individuals with disabilities and sole parents with school aged children. The long-term unemployed also faced increased obligations, and mature age jobseekers aged 50-65 years are now under the same obligations to look for work as other jobseekers.

The justification for the punitive and harsh active participation arrangements is predicated on the unsubstantiated myth, that the unemployed are lazy and lack the motivation to find work. Recent comments in the media by key Ministers labelling welfare recipients as 'professional job avoiders' has further perpetuated this myth. In contrast, research has found disadvantaged jobseekers in particular to be highly motivated to find work and aspire to participate fully in their communities (see Horn and Jordan, 2006; Sawer, 2006; Coventry, 2005).

Melbourne Citymission continues to argue that the current approach to welfare reform fails the test of fairness, morality or efficacy. The weight of evidence shows that the compulsion aspect to active participation has resulted in further marginalisation and exclusion of significant numbers of jobseekers, primarily through the impact of breaching on their capacity to meet basic needs (see Horn and Jordan, 2006; Eardley et al, 2005; Kerr & Savelsberg, 2003).

According to media reports, almost 9,000 people have received 8-week payment suspensions since the reforms were implemented in July 2006. However the exact number of 8-week payment suspensions and the demographic profile of those receiving payment suspensions remains undisclosed by DEWR. The most recent data available from DEWR is from September 2006, the first quarter from when the reforms were implemented.

Over the past year, the Commonwealth Government has basked in unprecedented unemployment figures, in which the aggregate rate has fallen to 4.2%. This in part has led the Government to conclude that the Welfare to Work reforms are working. Arguably however, the falling aggregate rate is a result of overriding factors such as the global economy, which has led in particular to an increased demand for Australian primary produce and mineral resources. In addition, the labour market has changed fundamentally as we have shifted from an industrial to knowledge based economy (Ziguras et al 2004). This has resulted in a more polarised labour market between those with relevant high levels of technical skills and competencies (for example, health and IT) and those with poor educational achievement and skills who are reliant on low skilled manual and service industries. Furthermore, as the ABS's definition of 'employed' requires individuals to have only worked one hour in a week to be classified as 'employed', the extent to which individuals are able to adequately support themselves is grossly misrepresented by these figures.

Consequently, long-term unemployment, underemployment and youth unemployment still remain significant and stubborn social policy concerns in Australia. Currently, the teenage unemployment rate is substantially higher than the aggregate rate with 13.4% of 15-19 year olds looking for work (ABS 2007). Early school leavers are in particular risk of long-term unemployment. In areas of high disadvantage, such as in particular areas of Melbourne's West, the overall unemployment rate is three times higher than for the rest of the greater Melbourne metropolitan area (Mallett, 2006).

Last year, Melbourne Citymission published the “Give me a break! Welfare to work, a lost opportunity” report (Horn & Jordan, 2006), which documented the experiences of 186 disadvantaged jobseekers prior to the Welfare to Work reforms were implemented in July 2006. Melbourne Citymission was concerned that the Welfare to Work reforms, with the extension of punitive measures to single parents and those with disabilities, would further marginalise the more disadvantaged jobseekers without leading to better outcomes. The study found that almost half of all participants had left school at/ or before year 10 and a third were living in insecure housing. The main barriers preventing participants from finding work were a lack of experience, skills and training, ongoing personal issues and current housing crisis. In addition, over half of all participants had at some stage had their payments suspended by Centrelink. Of those living in insecure housing, a significant 72% had their payments stopped at some stage. As a result of their payment suspension, almost half of respondents were unable to pay for necessities such as food, and a quarter were unable to pay for accommodation. A number of participants reported that they became homeless as a direct result of their suspension.

This study seeks to monitor the impacts on disadvantaged jobseekers of the reforms since their introduction in July 2006. This report documents the findings from a survey of 172 clients, as well as findings from a series of case studies collected from across the organisation. As with last year’s report, we once again offer considered policy recommendations to ensure that vulnerable and disadvantaged jobseekers are assisted on a sustainable pathway to employment that acknowledges their backgrounds, experiences and capabilities.

2. Survey Methodology

Research questions

This study aimed to specifically monitor the impact on Melbourne Citymission's clients of the Welfare to Work policies since they were implemented in July 2006, and to measure any changes since the previous survey. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the barriers our clients experience when trying to find work?
- What do our clients consider useful for helping them find employment?
- What future hopes and aspirations do our clients have?
- How have the Welfare to Work policies impacted our workers and clients since July 2006?

Methodology

The primary data collection comprised interviews with a broad sample of Melbourne Citymission service users who met eligibility criteria relating to their participation in employment assistance and reliance on income support payments.

The structured survey questionnaire which was designed for the 2006 'Give me a break! Welfare to Work, a lost opportunity' report was utilised, after a few modifications and additions which took into account the changes since July 2006. The survey was designed to obtain client experiences of employment assistance, Centrelink, and training previously undertaken. Demographic information, work history and aspirations for the future were also collected (see Appendix 1). The survey questionnaire included a mixture of structured questions with pre-coded responses together with open-ended questions to allow participants to expand on the particular issues. A thematic analysis was undertaken of open-ended responses.

The survey was designed to be brief (less than 10 minutes) in recognition that a substantial proportion of likely participants were using crisis assistance services. This category of marginalised jobseekers experiencing some level of personal crisis or hardship often miss out in having their voices heard, so it was considered important to design the survey to facilitate inclusion of this needs group. This meant design of a short questionnaire that could be undertaken whilst clients were waiting for appointments to see Service staff or immediately following their appointment.

In addition, a series of case studies were collected from across the organisation to provide in-depth accounts of clients' experiences of the Welfare to Work reforms.

Eligibility

Clients that met any of the following criteria were invited to participate in the survey:

- i) are unemployed and looking for work; and/or
- ii) have received income from Centrelink which is subject to mutual obligation requirements or have been interviewed for job capacity over the past 12 months; and/or
- iii) have tried to obtain or are receiving employment assistance from the Job Network or other support services, including PSP and JPET over the past 12 months; and/or
- iv) are planning to seek work or obtain employment assistance within the next 6 months.

Sampling

Melbourne Citymission services that worked with clients who met any of the above criteria were asked to distribute the survey. Those clients that met the eligibility criteria were invited at an appropriate time by their Melbourne Citymission worker to participate in the survey.

A target of 150 clients across participating Melbourne Citymission programs was agreed. The estimated fortnightly client numbers using participating Melbourne Citymission services totalled 645 adults. The target sample therefore would represent approximately 23% of service users.

Procedure

The survey was conducted over a two-week period between Monday 30th April and Friday 11th May 2007.

The interviewers and support workers were provided with an information sheet that explained the survey and procedure (see Appendix 2). Interviewers invited clients to participate by verbally explaining the survey and providing a copy of the 'information sheet for participants' (see Appendix 3). Before beginning the survey, clients were reassured about confidentiality and their informed consent to participate was obtained (see ethics section below).

Most participants completed the survey with an interviewer who was independent of the program. Interviews were conducted in a private and quiet location. In some instances when a client indicated that they would like to answer the survey independently, participants were able to do so once the survey was explained and consent had been obtained. Clients completing the survey independently were able to discuss any questions they may have had with an interviewer during the survey.

On completion of the questionnaire, clients were reimbursed \$10 (voucher or cash) to compensate for their expenses and time.

Ethics

Confidentiality

All surveys were conducted in the strictest confidence, in a quiet and private space. No identifying information was recorded on the survey form. It was explained to all participants that the answers they gave would have no effect on the assistance they received at Melbourne Citymission at that time or in the future.

Consent

Consent to participate was obtained prior to conducting the survey, once the survey had been carefully explained verbally, and an information sheet for participants had been provided.

Debriefing

Although the survey did not include any personal questions, it was acknowledged that the survey might have raised issues of a personal nature for some clients. Interviewers were instructed to be sensitive to the client's attitude and state of mind during the interview. Interviewers were available to answer any questions participants might have had during or at the completion of the survey. When necessary, interviewers were to ensure that the participant was able to talk to someone after completing the survey if they needed to discuss any concerns from the survey.

Limitations

As with last year's survey, due to the variety of services recruited to participate in the survey, there were a relatively large number of interviewers and inevitable variations in interviewing styles occurred. Consequently some of the open-ended questions were answered in more detail depending on the interviewer, and occasionally clients choosing to complete the survey independently misinterpreted questions.

Not all services across Melbourne Citymission were able to recruit participants due to the nature of their service type and the eligibility criteria. Consequently the study yielded a sample with a high youth representation and the experiences of older jobseekers are underrepresented. In part this also is a reflection on the type of programs and geographic regions in which Melbourne Citymission operates in metropolitan Melbourne.

3. Profile of Participants

A total of 172 Melbourne Citymission clients participated in the 2007 Employment Chances Survey, with a fairly equal distribution of female and male participants (52% female and 48% male).

The median age of participants was 21 years, with an overall age range of between 16 and 54 years. Most participants were under 25 years of age (80%), with a significant proportion of participants aged 16–19 years (40%). This reflects the types of programs that participated in the survey, mainly youth homelessness and support programs, and employment and education programs that target young people (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participating programs and number of participants

| PROGRAM | NUMBER OF CLIENTS |
|--|-------------------|
| Frontyard Youth Services | 61 |
| Employment, Education, Training and Support Unit | 41 |
| Personal Support Program (PSP) | 23 |
| Women Exiting Prison Programs | 16 |
| Youth Housing/refuges | 14 |
| Slingshot Community Enterprise and Employment Centre | 9 |
| Young & Pregnant Parenting | 8 |
| TOTAL | 172 |

The majority of participants were single (81%). Only a small proportion of participants had children for whom they were the primary care giver (12%).

As illustrated by Table 2 over one quarter (27%) of participants were living in unstable housing at the time of the survey. A further 19% were staying rent free with family or friends and although many of these were living securely with family, a number were couch surfing and moving between friends' houses.

One third of all participants had been in their current housing for less than one month (34%) at the time of the survey, and over a third indicated that the last time they had a home, somewhere they felt safe and secure, was either never or longer than a year ago (36%).

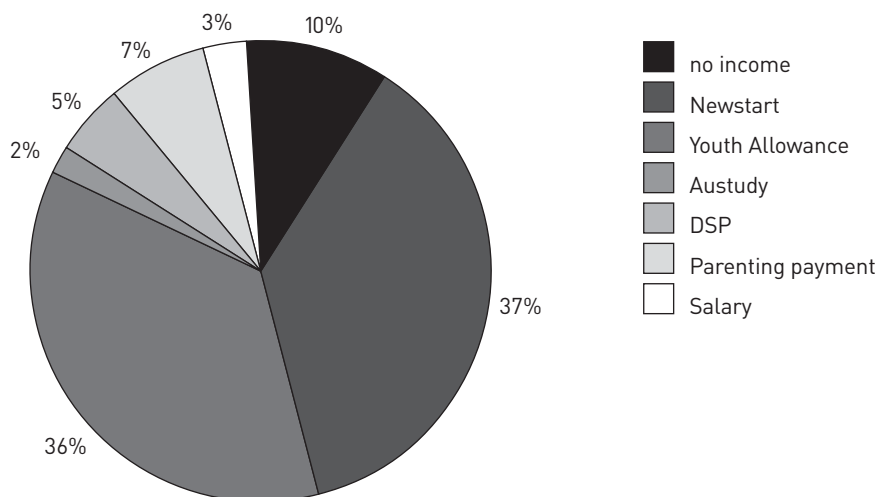
Table 2. Participant Housing Type

| HOUSING TYPE | N | % |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Staying with family/friends rent free | 32 | 19% |
| Staying with family/friends paying rent | 31 | 18% |
| Emergency accommodation/refuge | 22 | 13% |
| Community/Transitional Housing | 22 | 13% |
| Public Housing | 20 | 12% |
| Private rental property | 19 | 11% |
| Hostel/rooming house* | 10 | 6% |
| Car/tent/park/street/squat* | 6 | 3% |
| Hotel/motel | 4 | 2% |
| Boarding in a private home* | 4 | 2% |
| Prison* | 2 | 1% |
| TOTAL | 172 | 100% |

*Unstable/insecure housing.

Most participants were receiving either Newstart or Youth Allowance as their main form of income (73%). A small proportion was receiving no income at the time of the survey (10%). Only 3% of participants listed a salary as their main form of income (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Income type



Almost half of all participants had left school either at or before year 10 (43%). One fifth of participants had completed year 12 (21%), and 5% were currently still in secondary school. A small proportion of participants had a trade qualification or tertiary degree/ diploma (12%).

Table 3. Assistance provided to participants

| TYPE OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED | % |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Accommodation/ housing | 61% |
| Employment, education & training | 54% |
| Obtain/maintain benefit/allowance | 29% |
| Advice/Information | 26% |
| General counselling and support | 22% |
| Financial/ material aid | 18% |
| Legal assistance/ court support | 16% |
| Drug & alcohol support | 11% |
| Living skills/ personal development | 11% |
| Financial counselling and support | 10% |
| Health Centre | 9% |
| Recreation | 8% |
| Pregnancy or parenting support | 6% |
| Other | 3% |
| Disability services | 2% |
| Family planning | 2% |

Over half of all participants were seeking accommodation assistance (61%) or employment, education and training assistance (54%) when they came to Melbourne Citymission (see Table 3). Almost one third of participants sought assistance to obtain or maintain their Centrelink allowance (29%) and approximately one quarter required advice or information (26%) and general counselling and support (22%).

As with the previous year's survey, the average number of "types of assistance" sought by participants were two per person.

Summary

As illustrated by Table 4 below, this year's sample is relatively similar to the 2006 Employment Chances Survey sample.

Table 4. Comparison of demographics from the 2006 & 2007 Employment Chances Surveys

| | 2006 | 2007 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Sample size | 186 | 172 |
| Median age | 20 years | 21 years |
| % female | 51% | 52% |
| Family status: % single | 77% | 81% |
| Income type: % receiving Youth Allowance or Newstart | 71% | 73% |
| Left school at or before year 10 (%) | 47% | 43% |
| Housing type: % in unstable/insecure housing | 29% | 27% |

As with the 2006 survey, this year's sample is representative of Melbourne Citymission's jobseeker clients and disadvantaged jobseekers in general, which will enable an exploration of the impact on this group of the Welfare to Work reforms over the past year.

4. Survey Findings

Work History

A significant proportion of participants indicated that in the past they had usually worked in casual positions (40%). A slightly smaller proportion stated that they had mainly been employed in either regular part-time or full-time work (35%). A small percentage of participants had never worked (15%), or had never been in the workforce due to various factors including caring for children, poor health or full-time study (10%). This equates to one in four participants never having had any work experience.

Very few participants were currently in any form of employment (8%). The majority of participants were not employed but were looking for work (68%). This is higher than last year's sample, where 58% of participants were unemployed and looking for work.

Almost one quarter were not currently working or looking due to factors such as poor health, significant personal issues and full-time study (24%).

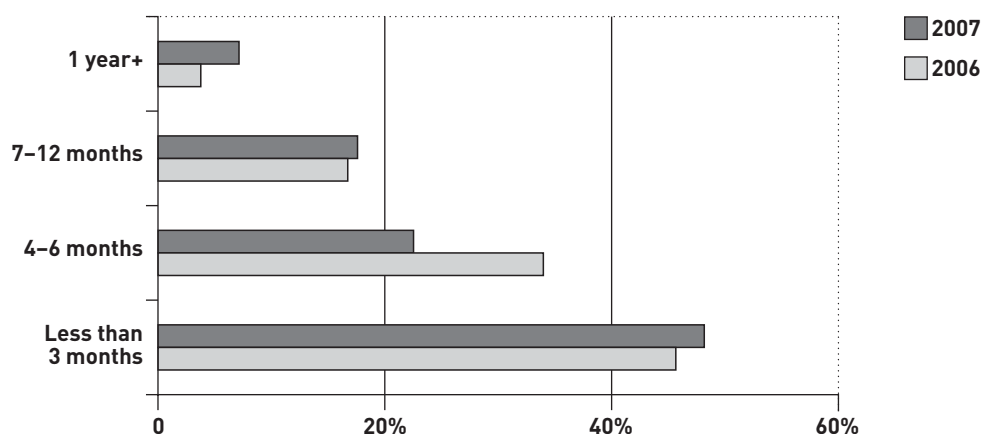
*"Getting somewhere to live first is a bit more important than having a job."
19 year old young woman, homeless.*

Looking for work

As illustrated by Figure 2, of the participants currently looking for work (n=120), half had been looking for less than 3 months (51%). Almost a quarter (23%) had been looking for 4-6 months, and 17% had been looking for 7-12 months. A small proportion (9%) had been looking for work for over 1 year.

The median length of time participants had been looking for work was 3 months, with a range of 1 month to 72 months. This is a similar length of time to the previous year's median of 4 months.

Figure 2. Length of time looking for work 2006 & 2007



Although over a quarter of participants (26%) had been looking for work for more than 7 months, participants remained optimistic about finding work. Over half stated that their chances of finding work over the next three months were either good or really good (57%). This was higher than the previous year's survey where 43% felt their chances were good.

Almost a third of participants stated that their chances of finding work over the next three months were ok (30%), and a small proportion felt they were bad or really bad (13%).

"I'm not qualified to do anything. I can only do jobs that require labour. I suffer from a fair bit of depression. I'm starting to get a handle on that now though, I've got the right medication." 22 year old male, sleeping on Dad's couch.

Barriers to finding work

As with the previous year's survey participants reported a broad range of barriers they experienced trying to find work. Once again, one of the most commonly reported barriers to finding work was a lack of experience, with almost one quarter of all participants listing this as a significant difficulty they experienced (24%). One in five participants stated that their current housing situation was making it difficult to find work (21%).

"Accommodation is hell, trying to find it. I am juggling my own self-employment too and looking for housing too is really intense. The point is you can't really concentrate on something if you don't know where you're going to sleep that night." 20 year old young woman, staying in a refuge.

Other main barriers experienced by participants included a lack of affordable or accessible transport (16%), mental health issues, health issues or disability (13%) and a criminal record or related issues (13%).

"I've been on and off the streets and on and off being homeless...also my sickness, I'm epileptic, that all makes it a bit hard sometimes." 24 year old male, living on the streets.

Participants described a variety of activities, circumstances and supports that they thought would help them to find work, which were quite similar to last year's responses. The most commonly cited were support workers (20%), stable housing (15%) and training courses (14%). In this year's survey, access to transport (16%) was also seen to be an important factor in assisting participants to find work.

"More or less just accommodation at the moment. Just to get stable" 21 year old male, living on the streets.

Others included access to computers, the Internet and newspapers, experience and qualifications and less prejudice, to be given 'a fair go'.

"I'm qualified to do something, but I have no experience. But you need experience, but how are you meant to get that if no one gives you a go?" 17 year old female, staying in a hotel.

Participants were also asked what had helped them find work in the past. The most common responses were agency support and support workers (27%), through word of mouth and contacts (23%), and access to resources such as computers and telephones (16%).

"I'm trying just to live at the moment" 21 year old male, living on the streets.

Experience with employment and training programs

The majority of participants had taken part in employment and training programs in the last two years (65%) including Job Network programs, PSP, JPET and TAFE vocational courses. This is somewhat higher to last year's sample where 58% of participants had participated in employment or training programs over the last two years.

Most programs were seen to be helpful or very helpful (66%) in assisting participants to find work and resolve barriers to gaining work. There was however some variance between the types of programs. Whilst just under half of participants that had participated in Job Network programs had found them helpful (49%), 79% of participants that had engaged with PSP or JPET programs found them helpful. In addition, 32% found their Job Network to be unhelpful or very unhelpful, compared to only 8% that found their JPET or PSP program to be unhelpful.

"I found JPET very helpful, it works face to face. But Job Network, you just have interviews. If you don't turn up they cut off your payments. They don't have the time for you. I got out, they cut off my payments. JPET is not like that." 18 year old male, homeless.

This was supported in the range of reasons participants gave for why particular programs had been helpful or unhelpful. The most commonly stated reasons for why programs had been helpful included assistance looking for and obtaining work (22%), assistance to resolve significant personal issues which were barriers to finding work (19%), programs that were encouraging and which helped participants gain confidence and explore options (18%), and programs that enabled participants to gain new skills, experience and qualifications (18%).

"Job network helpful financially but disorganised and lack care for clients. PSP has allowed me to sort things out and have shown a lot of consideration towards my individual situation." 25 year old male.

Programs that were seen to be less helpful were those where the workers did not understand the complexity of issues experienced by participants. Participants reported that it was difficult to engage with programs where they felt they were not understood or were judged. In addition, programs and workers that did not encourage the participant's preferred vocational pathways or interests were also seen to be less helpful and supportive.

Experiences with Centrelink and income assistance

Most clients had received income assistance from Centrelink in the past 12 months (88%, n=151). Of these, half (49%, n=74) had their income reduced at some stage in the past year as a result of an overpayment and/ or a loan.

Experiences with loans and overpayments

The majority of these participants had their income reduced as a result of a loan (n=54, 73%). Participants reported various reasons for applying for the loan, with many discussing the need to buy necessities such as food and to pay bills. Other participants had used the extra money to pay for school fees, to pay for another loan, to pay for dental care and to afford items for their children.

"I struggle to live on a different amount, even the normal amount is tight. People say we're bludgers but we get half of what a normal person gets in a week and still have to pay rent and food." 22 year old male, living in insecure housing.

A smaller proportion of participants had their income reduced as a result of an overpayment (n=21, 28%). Reasons for the overpayments were varied. Whilst some participants were paying back an overpayment that resulted from them working and not informing Centrelink, a number of participants had received extra money due to errors made by Centrelink. Participants in this situation had sometimes spent the money without realising it. Some participants discussed how the overpayment had been a result of factors out of their control, such as leaving school after becoming homeless. Other participants had continued to receive Centrelink payments whilst in prison.

“Centrelink can’t do anything wrong, no one gets blamed for it. They’ve always got an excuse. We’ve never got an excuse. You do one little thing wrong and cop it....When I got overpaid I didn’t know...that could happen to a lot of people.” 18 year old male, homeless.

The impact of repaying a loan or overpayment to Centrelink varied significantly between clients. Whilst over a third stated that the repayments had made very little impact on their lives (37%), a significant 43% indicated that the repayments had resulted in considerable hardship and they struggled to pay for basic living necessities such as rent and food on a very low income. A further one in five (20%) indicated that the repayments had made life a little harder, which required even stricter budgeting and sacrifices.

*“Had a great impact because I’m in debt. I took out a few other loans as well. I turned to crime because I had no money to feed myself, and I still don’t.”
17 year old male.*

Of those participants that had their payments reduced, a significant 41% reported that they hadn’t had a home for either longer than a year or never.

Experiences with participation failure warnings and breaches

One in five (n=29) participants in receipt of income assistance in the past 12 months had been issued with at least one Participation Failure notice at some stage over the year. Of these clients, over half had been in their current housing for less than a month (n=15).

“Its actually a really good idea for those that don’t make appointments, but stupid if you are sick. If someone deserves it then good, give them a good kick up the bum! But if someone has called up with a good reason then that’s unfair. If I deserve it, I’m the kind of person that will take it fine.” 18 year old female.

Participants were asked about what circumstances had led to them being issued with a Participation Failure notice. Most participants had missed or were late to a Job Network or Centrelink appointment. Reasons for receiving a participation failure warning varied, however most gave reasons which were associated with the issues they were currently experiencing, including homelessness and ill health.

“I missed my PSP meeting as I was looking for work and had a parole meeting. I was more worried about getting locked up again, wasn’t even thinking about Centrelink.” 22 year old male, living in a hostel.

Of the participants that had been receiving Centrelink income over the past year, 27 (18%) reported that their payments had been stopped at some stage in the last 12 months. Of these, eleven had been in their current housing for less than one month at the time of the survey. This is a marked reduction to the proportion reported in the previous study, where over half (55%) of participants reported having their payments stopped. However, in this year’s survey participants were only asked whether their payments had been stopped in the past year, where as the previous survey asked participants whether their payments had been stopped at any time in the past.

A third of participants that had their payments stopped in the current study had their full income stopped for the full 8 weeks (n=9), with one participant reporting that this was ongoing, as he could no longer cope with dealing with Centrelink. The remaining participants had their payments stopped from anywhere between a few days and six weeks.

Almost half of these participants indicated that they borrowed money off friends and family to pay for necessities during their non-payment period. One in three stated that they had to rely on food vouchers and support from community organisations in order to afford basics such as food.

As with the participants that had received participation failure warnings, the reasons for having their payments stopped varied.

"I went to a job, I thought I had rights...they didn't provide me with an induction, they just threw me in the job, they said I had no rights...was a labouring job. I tried to discuss it with the boss but he took it the wrong way so I went home. The person who was meant to train me didn't turn up. They had also offered me an apprenticeship but wouldn't tell me my wages." 21 year old male, living on the streets.

Although a handful of participants stated that it was a result of not meeting their mutual obligation requirements due to their own fault, the majority gave valid reasons for not being able to keep up with appointments and other mutual obligation requirements, such as illness, homelessness and the complexity of issues they were currently experiencing. A couple of participants discussed how their payments had been cut off as a direct result of an error on Centrelink's part.

"I rang up to ask for a couple of days so I could get my enrolment slips, but they cut it off anyway. I couldn't even pay my enrolment fees." 16 year old male, staying in a refuge.

As with the previous study, the majority (n=19) of participants reported that having their payments stopped had a significant impact on their ability to afford basics such as food, housing and bills.

"I got kicked out of my accommodation as couldn't pay rent" 17 year old male, never had a home where he felt safe, stable and secure.

Two thirds indicated that it had a significant impact on their health, including adding further stress to already stressful circumstances and in a couple of cases exacerbated already significant mental health issues.

Over a third reported that the breach had a significant impact on their ability to look for or participate in work, education or training. A couple of participants also mentioned that being cut off their payments had placed them further into debt.

"Couldn't look for work, didn't have clothes. Couldn't print out a resume and too shitted off to look!" 18 year old male, whose father wouldn't hand in a parental assets form.

Future hopes, aspirations and goals

As with the previous year's survey, participants discussed a range of future hopes, aspirations and goals. The most commonly discussed theme was a strong desire to work, with 65% of participants wanting to find work within the next year.

"I want to work hard and make my life better" 23 year old young woman.

A significant number were hoping to be studying in a year's time (43%), and a similar proportion was hoping to be in stable accommodation (39%). These three aspirations were also the most commonly discussed in last year's survey.

"Doing a course, studying, having accommodation with affordable rent, a balanced lifestyle, not chaotic. I'm sick of it. I just want to be like everyone else." 22 year old male, had a stable home longer than a year ago.

Other hopes, aspirations and goals included starting a business, resolving drug and alcohol issues, starting a family, having a more stable life, financial stability, travel, independence, and being healthy and happy.

"I hope to have a place I can call home, a job and be back into getting an education. I also want regular access with my little sister. That means the world to me, that's why I really want a home. And to be with my boyfriend, to wake up next to the person that means the most to me. The best thing about having a home is having somewhere to go." 17 year old young woman, homeless, staying in a hostel.

5. Case Studies

The following client stories are a sample from a series of case studies collected from across Melbourne Citymission, which illustrate some of the impacts of the Welfare to Work reforms since their introduction in July 2006.

The complexity of issues experienced by disadvantaged jobseekers

A significant proportion of clients Melbourne Citymission works with, experience multiple barriers to finding work, which require long-term support to enable sustainable transitions to employment. As this year's survey once again highlights, many clients experience a number of significant barriers to finding and maintaining work, including homelessness, poverty, health issues and a criminal record.

Sally's story below (as with many of the stories in this section) highlights the complexity of issues many Melbourne Citymission clients experience, and how mutual obligation hurdles can in fact trip these clients and set them back further on their employment pathway.

Case study 1. Sally

Sally is 29-year-old female, who is single and receiving Newstart allowance from Centrelink, Sally was released from Custody (Dame Phyllis Frost Centre) in October 2006 after serving an 8-month sentence. Sally was placed on Newstart on release.

Sally was referred to Melbourne Citymission's Women's Integrated Support Program (WISP) to provide pre and post release support for a variety of issues including: reintegration into the community, housing assistance, addressing of debts, employment and education. Sally has a history of drug dependence (however she has not used since 2003), and self-harming. Sally also suffers from depression and agoraphobia which impact on her ability to always follow through with appointments due to internal fears and mental health issues. Sally is taking medication for her depression. Since Melbourne Citymission's involvement, Sally has presented as highly motivated to create change in her life.

The main difficulty faced at this stage is that Sally has been issued with a Notice to Vacate from her Transitional property. Sally was recently breached from Centrelink for missing 3 appointments and is now in 4 weeks rental arrears (she is facing eviction). She will not receive any income for another 4 weeks.

Sally is also linked with the Woman 4 Work program at Melbourne Citymission that assists with employment, education, resume writing and interview skills. She has been linked with a recruitment agency who has been providing her with casual employment in a food processing factory (however the work is not guaranteed and Sally must phone or present at the agency daily to see if work is available).

Some of Sally's identified goals are to obtain safe secure affordable housing to assist with changing the cycle of homelessness, offending, incarceration, and drug dependence. Sally also wants to find security in employment and continue with further education. Sally would like to continue working on her drug addictions and mental health with support workers. Finally Sally would like to link with a financial counselling to address her debts and work on budgeting skills. Sally is working hard to achieve these goals.

The significant impact of organisational errors on disadvantaged jobseekers

As highlighted by this year's survey and the 2006 survey, disadvantaged jobseekers often experience breaches, payment suspensions and overpayments, which are the direct result of mistakes on the part of Centrelink and other service providers.

John and Fatima's experiences (see case studies below) clearly illustrate the repercussions of a simple organisational error on the already insecure circumstances of young disadvantaged job seekers.

Case study 2. John

John, a 20 year old young man experiencing homelessness had been receiving a Youth Allowance payment from Centrelink for a year. Upon accessing JPET at Melbourne Citymission he provided all necessary documents and official commencement agreements signed by himself and his JPET worker, to Centrelink. He had been with JPET for almost 3 months when his Youth Allowance payment was withheld due to a computer error.

This error occurred when he had been handing in a required form at Centrelink and the attending Centrelink officer informed him that the computer had no record of him being a JPET client. Although both John and his JPET worker protested due to the obvious mistake, the Centrelink worker said that because the data was not in the computer they would need the JPET worker to re-send documents that had already been cited and approved by Centrelink.

Due to this organisational mistake, John had to see a Job Capacity Assessor at Centrelink and apply for the Youth Allowance payment all over again. John said that the Job Capacity Assessment took over an hour whereby they "looked at every aspect of my life".

The Job Capacity Assessor quickly discovered that John was in a desperate situation and advocated for his payments to be restored. John was assured his payments would be re-instated in a day, but it took over a week for the money to appear in his bank account. John says of this experience:

"I couldn't eat, I couldn't do anything- I had my mates feeding me, I stayed at a couple of mates houses".

Due to an internal error at Centrelink, whereby the information cited when provided by John was not saved on the system, John's payments were cancelled. The repercussions of this compounded on John's already unstable situation, placing him even more at risk. He was eventually able to move into a Youth Refuge, which gave him temporary accommodation while he looked for private housing.

Fatima's story also highlights the irony that Welfare to Work policies can in fact jeopardise newly found employment pathways, when payment suspensions are enacted immediately, prior to any consideration of the circumstances surrounding the supposed participation failure.

Case study 3. Fatima

Fatima is 17 years of age and has been receiving payments from Centrelink since she arrived in Australia four years ago as a refugee. She signed up with Melbourne Citymission's JPET program in Footscray.

Fatima fulfilled a Centrelink Job Search obligation by becoming a Job Network member 3 months ago. Since this time she has been complying with Job Network, Centrelink and JPET obligations and appointments, despite being in transient housing and having very little financial means.

Recently, Job Network found Fatima an apprenticeship position in a salon. Fatima lodged a successful application and was accepted for the position. The success of her impending apprenticeship prompted Fatima and her JPET worker to inform Job Network that Fatima would no longer need their service. This was important because Job Network had scheduled Fatima for a Resume Writing Seminar, which Fatima was no longer required to attend.

In a documented telephone conversation with Job Network, Fatima and her JPET worker were assured that Fatima would be exited from the Job Network system as soon as possible and therefore would not be expected to attend the Resume Writing Seminar.

However, when Fatima went to a meeting at Centrelink with her JPET worker to switch her type of payment, she found out that her Youth Allowance payment had been cut. Job Network had filed a Participation Report against Fatima, due to Fatima not attending the Resume Writing Seminar. She was penalised even though she had been advised not to attend this meeting.

A Participation Report was filed due to an organisational error and despite Fatima's compliance with her Centrelink and Job Network requirements.

Fatima follows a strict fortnightly financial plan, as she received fortnightly payments from Centrelink. Due to her payments being suspended for 8 weeks she not only lost what little financial stability she had, but she was at risk of not being able to make her rent payments or buy food. She was also in danger of jeopardising her employment situation, as she was unable to travel to and from her apprenticeship.

The lack of communication between Government, Centrelink and providers and the impact on disadvantaged jobseekers

Under the new compliance and penalty regime jobseeker's payments are often dependent upon the adequacy of the service providers. Steven's story below shows the serious repercussions a lack of communication between agencies can cause, as well as the serious impacts an unfair payment suspension can have, particularly when a young person is simply attempting to engage in appropriate training and employment.

Case study 4. Steven

A few months ago, Steven was studying full time for his security license, which he felt would increase his chances of finding paid employment. This was a 3 month course, with regular homework and tests. Although the class was scheduled from 9am to 5pm on a full time basis, Steven frequently had to miss classes in order to attend his Job Network and Centrelink meetings.

One day Steven was unable to go to an appointment with Job Network due to crucial study commitments. He called his Job Network Officer to re-schedule for another time and was excused for missing the appointment. Despite this, Steven soon learned his Centrelink payment had been cut as he had been issued with a Serious Participation Failure. He had been receiving Youth Allowance from Centrelink for 2 years.

Having his sole income suspended had immediate implications for Steven. He was living in transitional housing; whereby rent was directly deducted from his Centrelink payments. When his payment didn't arrive, he was forced out of his accommodation.

Hanover Housing Services gave Steven crisis accommodation, but he says he was unable to concentrate on his studies. He recalls that whenever he called Centrelink during that time he was told to call Job Network, and vice-versa.

"Centrelink and Job Network, they don't communicate with each other. Other people cop it too. They kept blaming each other. I was like a soccer ball they were kicking around"

Steven's Housing Support Worker gave him vouchers for food, but he fell behind in paying his bills. Steven was referred to Frontyard Youth Services by a nurse at Youth Health; and was able to speak to someone about having his payments reinstated. After a week of having no money or accommodation, Steven's payments were restored.

Steven is still dealing with the effects of having his income temporarily suspended. He continues to struggle with his accommodation, and suffer from stress and frustration.

"I don't like just staying a few nights here, a few nights there. You don't feel comfortable. You can't settle. You can't fall asleep easily"

In Peter's situation his payments could have been affected simply because of poor communication and procedural failures by his Job Network provider.

Case study 5. Peter

Peter is an 18 year old man referred to Melbourne Citymission's JPET program to assist him to overcome barriers preventing him from successfully participating in employment. Peter has a history of transient behaviour and a lack of support networks. With the assistance of JPET, Peter has been working to overcome his limited education by undertaking a life skills program to enhance his employability.

As required by Centrelink Peter was registered with a Job Network provider however due to difficulties with travel distance it became impractical for him to remain with this provider, after consulting with his Job Network caseworker a transfer was granted to a closer provider. Due to a delay with the new provider Peter was not immediately signed up, instead was told to await a phone call to set up an appointment. This delay led to him being sent a letter from the original provider demanding his attendance at an appointment.

At this stage Peter contacted JPET believing his transfer must have been denied, the JPET worker contacted both providers and confirmed transfer had gone ahead however the new provider had not yet had time to meet with him. The provider informed Peter that he would be contacted ASAP. One week later the exact scenario was repeated. Peter received a text message from the original provider stating he had to attend an appointment the following day or risk having his payment suspended.

Under Job Network guidelines clients unable to attend an appointment are required to provide adequate notice of inability to attend or else risk having their payments suspended. The ability of JPET participants to adhere to this can be extremely difficult as they often do not have a fixed postal address and receiving a reminder text the day before does not provide them a chance to give the required advance notice.

Knowing that failure to attend this appointment could result in a participation failure being submitted against him, Peter contacted JPET very panicked as he knew he could not make that appointment and was confused as to why the situation had not yet been rectified despite being reassured it had.

After numerous phone calls to both Job Networks it became clear that his transfer had somehow become lost in the system, and while he was expecting his new Job Network to be in the process of arranging his sign up, they had in fact misplaced all of his details and had no record of his or JPET's numerous inquiries. If not for the fact that Peter promptly contacted his JPET worker for advice he would have been at risk of having a Participation Failure Report lodged against him.

Melbourne Citymission has since been informed by DEWR that JPET clients are not required to be engaged with a Job Network provider. This decision has been reversed and reimplemented a number of times over the past year. This lack of communication and clarity between government and service providers has led to significant consequences for young homeless jobseekers. These young people have been juggling numerous mutual obligation hurdles and requirements, whilst receiving mixed messages around their requirements, as well as attempting to cope with major and complex issues such as homelessness.

The increasing pressure on workers and the necessity for highly skilled advocates

Many of the stories in this section also highlight the necessity within the current system for young disadvantaged jobseekers to have highly skilled advocates that are abreast of a continuously changing policy environment, and to ensure problems are rectified. These case studies clearly show that the system as it currently stands does not provide the necessary safeguards to ensure disadvantaged jobseekers are treated fairly and appropriately.

As Paul's story below also highlights, support workers are now experiencing an increasing level of pressure as a result of Welfare to Work policies. Dealing with increasingly volatile situations has become more commonplace for support workers as clients become more desperate and frustrated with the inadequacies of the system. Furthermore, workers are faced with increasing workloads as they attempt to assist their clients to jump through the many hurdles the new reforms have created, whilst trying to address the complex barriers their clients are experiencing. As one Melbourne Citymission JPET worker expressed:

"JPET is meant to assist young people in overcoming their barriers to employment. How is this even possible when JPET workers spend such massive amounts of time navigating the impenetrable maze of Centrelink?"

Case study 6. Paul

Paul is a 17 year old man recently placed in transitional housing. He was referred by his housing worker to JPET to assist in overcoming his barriers. Up until the previous week Paul had been homeless and dealing with substance abuse and family conflict.

When he met with JPET for the first time he mentioned receiving a letter the week before regarding a Job Network appointment. Due to his housing situation, he had difficulty in obtaining his mail and ended up missing the appointment. With the assistance of JPET Paul spoke with Centrelink and was informed Job Network had lodged a Participation Report thereby suspending his payments. As a result Paul was required to phone the Area Participation Solutions Team (APST) and explain his reasons for non-attendance before having his payment reinstated.

After being placed on hold for 35 minutes he finally had the opportunity to discuss his situation, however the frustration already experienced by Paul was exacerbated significantly by being told bluntly less than 20 seconds into the phone call that "being homeless is no excuse". While in accordance with Centrelink guidelines this is accurate, this response was delivered in such a dismissive and blunt way it resulted in the young man becoming so upset and distressed he could no longer continue the conversation. The conversation had to be continued by the JPET worker while other workers attempted to calm down and comfort Paul.

After speaking with the APST worker it became obvious that further discussion with this worker was not going to address the situation. Through a personal contact of the JPET worker a phone call was put through to a different APST worker who initially suggested the only way to have Paul's payments reinstated was to attend an appointment with Job Network that very same day. This however was difficult as JPET had already arranged essential appointments for Paul to address his medical and housing needs. After JPET outlined the impracticalities of such a plan the decision was eventually made to override the initial Participation Report lodged by Job Network and a new referral was put in place.

This situation caused a tremendous amount of unnecessary distress for the young man involved. By the end of the experience he left the office after several hours much more upset and depressed about his situation than when he arrived.

Weaknesses of the Job Capacity Assessment

Through the Job Capacity Assessment process, Melbourne Citymission has received a number of inappropriate referrals, where disadvantaged jobseekers have been assessed as work capable, despite experiencing significant barriers. As highlighted in the previous study, disadvantaged jobseekers need to be supported to ensure all barriers are disclosed at the time of assessment. The current JCA process ensures jobseekers are only given a one-off chance to disclose their barriers, and little opportunity is provided for the assessor to follow up on any concerns.

This is highlighted by Samira's experience below, where the ludicrous situation arose of a 61-year-old woman with cancer being assessed as capable of working 30+ hours per week. Once more this story highlights the necessity for disadvantaged clients to have highly skilled advocates within the current system. In this case, the support worker's concern for their client and consequent advocacy also resulted in a situation that reflected poorly on their program outcomes.

Case study 7. Samira

Samira, a 61-year-old woman on Newstart was called into Centrelink for a Special Needs Assessment after the submission of a medical certificate. Samira had previously relied on submitting medical certificates to exempt her from fulfilling Centrelink obligations due to her serious medical issues. Revised Centrelink policy however meant that she needed to be assessed by a Job Capacity Assessor upon the presentation of two consecutive certificates.

Through this appointment Samira communicated the reason for the submission of the medical certificate was due to her diagnosis of cancer in the larynx. She had not however taken any 'medical evidence' to the appointment to prove this condition. Samira furthermore reported having partial care of her four grandchildren (ranging from the ages of 2-13 years) because her daughter-in-law was unable to take care of them due to her own severe medical issues and that this was quite a demanding responsibility.

The Job Capacity Assessor also identified a more extensive list of barriers including cross-cultural issues; caring responsibilities; limited independence; limited skills/experience; physical limitations restricting type of work; limited physical abilities and no formal education.

Despite these barriers, the Job Capacity assessment concluded that Samira had the capacity to work 30+ hours per week as her health conditions "did not restrict her from undertaking heavy household duties such as vacuuming, washing and hanging out the clothes". The Job Capacity Assessment referred Samira to the Personal Support Programme (PSP) in an aim to assist Samira with her barriers.

This was highly distressing for Samira as her medical condition made it very difficult for her to travel independently and she also had a limited ability to speak or understand English.

Samira was assessed by the PSP worker as having minimal capacity to benefit from PSP and thus she was supported in reapplying for the Disability Support Pension. This was approved 4 months later.

While this was a successful outcome for Samira, this proved to be an extremely distressing process, which caused her to experience quite extreme angst and pressure in order to receive her Newstart payment. Furthermore, even though Samira was supported through this process by the PSP worker the performance management system that DEWR has established for PSP meant that this case negatively affected one of the criteria through which PSP is measured, as PSP failed to 'retain' Samira for the full PSP duration.

The client stories presented in this section have all highlighted the complexity of issues experienced by disadvantaged jobseekers and the significant impact the Welfare to Work reforms have had on their lives. In particular, mutual obligation requirements that do not adequately take into account an individual's current situation, as well as organisational errors and a lack of communication between Government, Centrelink and providers has led to major repercussions for disadvantaged jobseekers. In addition these stories illustrate the increasing pressures on workers since the reforms, and the absolute necessity for disadvantaged jobseekers to have highly skilled advocates assisting them to negotiate their way through the system.

Furthermore, these case studies were collected over a relatively short period of time and from only one agency in Melbourne. The long term impacts and effects of these reforms are yet to be observed.

6. Policy Implications

The evidence from this year's survey and client stories once more highlights the significant barriers disadvantaged jobseekers experience securing and maintaining employment. Very little has changed for this group of jobseekers over the past year, in regard to the issues they experience looking for work. Over a third of all participants had not had a safe and secure home for over a year, almost half had left school either at or before year 10, and one in four participants had never had any work experience. Participants listed multiple barriers to finding work including a lack of experience, housing instability, transport costs, chronic health issues and a criminal record.

Despite their barriers, all participants had hopes and aspirations for the next year. Once more we found no evidence of any reluctance to get off benefits and obtain work. To the contrary, the majority of participants wanted to find work. A significant proportion hoped to be completing some form of study and over a third hoped to find stable housing. On the whole, participants aspired to be leading better and more stable lives, and to be able to participate in a 'normal' life which most Australians take for granted such as working, gaining financial stability and independence, building a family, being healthy and happy, and having a home.

As we stated last year, a more effective employment assistance system must be predicated on an acknowledgement of the aspirations and hopes held by most jobseekers to make a better life for themselves and their families. This should include effective engagement and assessment of barriers to employment, adequate income support to meet basic needs and to assist employment transitions, an effective and fair welfare system, and the provision of integrated assistance to achieve sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers.

6.1 Effective engagement and assessment of barriers to employment

In 2006 we argued that:

The starting point for reform to substantially improve the level of sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers ought to be a meaningful engagement to facilitate complete assessment of their backgrounds and experiences.

It is Melbourne Citymission's view that the latest changes under the welfare-to-work banner, to be implemented from July 2006, do not address these systemic weaknesses. In fact, many of the changes are likely to exacerbate the existing situation. The contracting out of the assessment of an income recipient's capacity to work (Job Capacity Assessment) and further devolution of assessment and monitoring functions to Job Network providers, with tight unit costings and strict performance criteria, risk increased levels of incomplete assessment of the barriers faced by disadvantaged income recipients.

Centrelink should be better resourced to have in place effective processes that ensure effective engagement of disadvantaged jobseekers and complete disclosure of all relevant issues or barriers to participation in work.

Whilst the Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) has on the whole enabled support workers to have a better understanding of the barriers faced by clients on referral from Centrelink, inappropriate assessments of clients' work capacity remain problematic.

The JCA assessment process has led to Melbourne Citymission receiving a number of inappropriate referrals, where disadvantaged jobseekers have been assessed as work capable, despite experiencing significant barriers. Disadvantaged jobseekers must be supported to ensure all barriers are disclosed at the time of assessment. The current process only provides jobseekers with a one-chance interview to disclose their barriers, and little opportunity is

provided for the assessor to follow up on any issues. This is of particular concern for vulnerable clients where the development of trust is a necessity for disclosing all barriers. This is problematic in instances where it has not been possible to gather all relevant and necessary documentation prior to the interview. **Greater flexibility is required to provide scope for further assessments where barriers may have been omitted or where issues arise in the future, without penalties for the JCA assessor or employment assistance provider.**

In addition, the outsourcing of the JCA to a number of external providers has created greater fragmentation of the system for transient and vulnerable clients. It has created yet another stop that jobseekers must make within the employment assistance system that is increasingly becoming an unnegotiable maze.

Melbourne Citymission calls for a review of the JCA assessment process to ensure that vulnerable customers are effectively engaged, assessed and referred. Clients must be encouraged to fully disclose barriers to employment, to assist Centrelink to make effective referrals to the most appropriate assistance. The assessment process must ensure that vulnerable clients are supported to gather all necessary documentation and that follow up is provided when additional information can be gathered. The JCA process should also enable disadvantaged people to bring along family members or other supports (eg housing workers or advocates) to ensure their barriers to employment are communicated effectively.

6.2 Provision of adequate income support to meet basic needs and to assist employment, education and training transitions

In this year's survey, one in three participants had their income reduced in the past year as a result of paying back a loan to Centrelink. Participants reported various reasons for applying for the loan, with many discussing the need to buy necessities such as food and to pay bills. Other participants had used the extra money to pay for school fees, to settle debts, to pay for dental care and to afford items for their children. Furthermore, most participants reported struggling to pay for necessities as a result of paying back their loan (or overpayment) to Centrelink. These findings are very similar to last year's where almost half of all participants reported difficulties paying for basic necessities such as food and accommodation on their current allowance.

With the high cost of living in metropolitan regions, which is now exacerbated by the chronic affordable housing crisis, disadvantaged jobseekers are struggling on the current levels of income support. **Melbourne Citymission calls for a review of current Newstart and Youth Allowance income rates and associated allowances (eg. Rent Assistance) to ensure jobseekers are able to meet basic needs, can engage in education and training pathways, and are able to break the cycle of debt that is an inherent part of living below the poverty line.**

6.3 Ensuring Welfare to Work reforms are effective and fair

In this year's survey, one in five participants had received a participation failure (warning) over the past year, and of these over half had been in their current housing for less than one month. A similar proportion had their payments actually stopped over the past year. As evidenced by the client stories presented in this report, support workers spend considerable resources advocating on behalf of clients that have been unfairly tripped by mutual obligation hurdles, or who have received participation failures as a result of organisational errors. It is therefore likely that interviews with other disadvantaged jobseekers not linked in with support services would have revealed even higher levels of participation failures and payment suspensions than the sample interviewed.

Last year we stated that:

The Commonwealth Government has sought to coerce income recipients to make greater efforts to obtain work and get off benefits through the implementation of multiple activities (for example the jobseeker diary) to encourage active participation in job search. Coercion is achieved through a strong compliance framework that includes punitive measures comprising immediate suspension and substantially reduced income support payments. A continual stream of evidence has been provided over the past decade to show this to be a flawed approach, in that:

- *imposed penalties further marginalise and inappropriately penalise the most vulnerable disadvantaged jobseekers*
- *the majority of jobseekers do not need to be coerced into finding work to escape poverty.*

There appears to be no substantive evidence to show that coercion through a harsh compliance framework increases welfare-to-work transitions.

Whilst all governments are entitled to take reasonable measures to ensure that income recipients are not rorting the welfare system, the compliance framework – although softened somewhat over the past 3 years following community based research and advocacy- is still predicated on the false assumption the majority of income recipients are ‘bludgers’. There has been no evidence to support this myth. One outcome of this flawed approach is that significant numbers of vulnerable jobseekers are being further marginalised.

In fact, the evidence from the client interviews and case studies in this report shows that the Welfare to Work reforms have led to:

- increased hurdles that trip disadvantaged jobseekers and in some circumstances jeopardise their employment, education and training pathways;
- continued organisational errors, which when combined with a payment suspension system that is enacted on a ‘suspend now, check later’ basis results in significant repercussions for disadvantaged jobseekers including stress and severe hardship paying for basic necessities such as housing;
- increased pressure on support workers as they cope with increasingly volatile situations and greater workloads;
- and a necessity for disadvantaged jobseekers to have highly skilled advocates to ensure problems are rectified and to assist them to navigate an increasingly complex employment assistance system. **The system does not currently have sufficient safeguards to ensure disadvantaged jobseekers are treated fairly and appropriately.**

In addition the lack of communication between Government, Centrelink and providers has been negligible. In particular, the lack of clarity around whether young homeless clients engaged with a JPET program are required to be enrolled with a Job Network provider has resulted in significant impacts for clients and support workers as illustrated by the stories presented in this report. Greater understanding should also be displayed by Centrelink Participation Reporting Teams around the significant barriers and vulnerabilities homeless jobseekers in particular experience. By not adequately taking into account the circumstances surrounding the supposed failure, the system is setting up the most disadvantaged jobseekers for failure.

It is Melbourne Citymission's experience that suspending income support payments takes away the basic means of survival for struggling individuals and families and serves to further marginalise already vulnerable jobseekers. **All Australians have a fundamental right to an adequate income to meet basic needs. Melbourne Citymission calls on the Commonwealth Government to abolish the compliance framework and associated penalties for disadvantaged jobseekers.**

Furthermore, Melbourne Citymission is concerned about the current cap on the PSP program, which has resulted in an excessive number of disadvantaged jobseekers waiting to commence with the program. **This unmet demand should not be used as a trigger to re-refer waiting clients to the Job Network.** Clients that have been assessed as not being job ready require a specialist response to address the significant barriers they experience to accessing employment.

As such, the PSP program should also not be subject to comparable performance criteria as the Job Network. **A review of the performance requirements on PSP providers is therefore required to ensure that social outcomes are of equal weighting to employment outcomes.**

6.4 Integrated assistance to achieve sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers

It is Melbourne Citymission's experience that integrated models of assistance which address the multiple barriers experienced by disadvantaged jobseekers, lead to more sustainable outcomes than coercive measures, which fail to address the underlying barriers to employment. Findings from this year's interviews show that disadvantaged jobseekers find the most helpful employment programs to be those that assist them to look for and obtain work; provide assistance to resolve significant personal issues and barriers to finding work; are encouraging, assisting them to gain confidence and explore interests and preferred pathways; and those that assist them to gain new skills, experience and qualifications. On the other hand, those programs that do not understand the complexity of issues experienced by disadvantaged jobseekers, and do not support their preferred vocational pathways or interests were deemed to be less helpful. This supports what we argued last year:

The Commonwealth Government has implemented a range of changes to employment assistance over the past decade. The balance of resources have focussed efforts on the short-term unemployed with emphasis on 'work first' approaches largely borrowed from US welfare policy. This approach is based on flawed assumptions and misunderstandings about the barriers faced by the longer term unemployed.

*It is evident that the international economy, with significant and sustained growth, has enabled a substantial reduction in the aggregate unemployment rate in Australia. Those with work experience and relevant skills and qualifications in the sectors with jobs growth have found work. However, despite some reduction in the numbers of long-term unemployed, those with multiple barriers to obtaining meaningful work remain a substantial challenge. As we have argued above, the punitive approach to employment assistance does not work and is not necessary, as the great majority of disadvantaged jobseekers are committed to finding work and escaping poverty. They need support and investment. **In addition, current***

forms of assistance remain fragmented, inefficient and are not as effective as they might be.

If we are to achieve sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged individuals and families who face multiple barriers to employment, then integrated models of assistance must be implemented that are based on the following key principles:

- *the client is placed at the centre of assistance and support*
- *flexible and timely access to assistance is available*
- *centrality of a primary case worker to ensure engagement and continuity of assistance*
- *adequate resources to provide a tailored package to specialist services*

*Notwithstanding the changes that have taken place over the past decade across the welfare portfolios, the system, from the perspective of service users and service providers, is becoming more fragmented and complicated. **The latest welfare-to-work reforms do not make the employment assistance and income support provisions any simpler.***

A single customised support program is required for those with significant barriers to work adopting the principles of joined-up case management with adequate resources to deliver a coordinated suite of training, work experience, health and welfare support based on individual needs, until a sustainable pathway to employment is achieved.

Our findings also illustrate once more that one of the critical barriers to a successful welfare-to-work transition is housing instability and homelessness. Both the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments continue to pay too little attention to preventing homelessness and transience and ensuring Australian households have affordable housing to enable social and economic participation.

Melbourne Citymission again urges both the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to work together with housing industry representatives to implement substantive housing policy reform to increase the supply of low cost housing, especially in locations with low skilled jobs growth. These reforms should include resources to enable 'joined-up' models of assistance for disadvantaged jobseekers that includes housing.

6.5 Participation in education, training and skills development

In the 2006 report we pointed to the following barriers preventing disadvantaged jobseekers from engaging in accessible and appropriate training:

1. *There remains a shortage of applied learning, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship places in occupations and trades that lead to emerging entry level jobs matched to local and regional needs. There exists a significant mismatch between the availability of places in courses and local labour shortages. The responsiveness of the vocational training system needs to be improved to eliminate this mismatch. Recent Victorian Government initiatives through the Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians package, announced in March, are welcomed by Melbourne Citymission. **However, additional reforms are needed at a local level to ensure courses offered in existing secondary and tertiary learning facilities remain relevant to employment opportunities.***

2. *Entry level criteria for traineeships and apprenticeships are too high. These criteria in many instances were set in a period of higher unemployment enabling a higher minimum standard to be set. **It is now appropriate to review the criteria so that they relate more closely to core competencies for the particular occupation, and thereby open up participation to more young people.***

3. *A significant proportion of applicants to vocational training courses in the future will have poor basic education and learning skills. Many will have poor histories of structured learning environments and will have long-term health conditions or disabilities. **Whilst the Victorian Government's skills and training initiatives are important, additional resources are required to support disadvantaged trainees and post-compulsory students so that they stay engaged and actively committed to learning.***

4. *The 'voluntary' fees and charges imposed by schools and post secondary learning institutions and the costs of transport to attend learning are critical barriers faced by disadvantaged young people. These are evident from the experience of the Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative. A commitment to a 'learning guarantee' that is inclusive of all Victorians must include policy measures that remove these critical barriers to participation. Despite the fact that public secondary school fees and charges are 'voluntary', in practice support workers report experiencing difficulties advocating for a waiver of fees for disadvantaged people returning to learning. In addition, students have to pay compulsory charges for consumable costs of participation in many vocational courses. These charges act to prevent or delay enrolment until funds are found through welfare assistance or initiatives such as YEETI. **If we wish to maximise the participation of disadvantaged Victorians in learning, exemptions from all fees and charges should be extended to increase equitable access and minimise exclusion because of financial hardship.** Current public transport costs (including the zoning system) unfairly penalise young people living in outer suburban locations who seek to enter post-secondary education, mainly at TAFE. Families in poverty also struggle to pay for a lump sum payment of an annual public transport card for their children attending school. **Making public transport free for those involved in learning would remove one of the barriers to participation and assist in making education and learning inclusive for all Victorians.***

5. *A further barrier facing sole parents who seek to gain qualifications or skills is the lack of affordable childcare that allows participation in formal learning. Despite the welfare-to-work stimulated increase in childcare places pledged by the Commonwealth Government, **a much higher level of resourcing is required to ensure that sole parents in disadvantaged communities who lack financial resources are able to access quality childcare that enables them to access training.** This requires collaboration between Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to consider innovative solutions for child care facilities linked to training institutions.*

Melbourne Citymission welcomes the initiatives recently announced by the State Government through a Fairer Victoria such as the Youth Guarantee, the Youth Transition Support initiative and the development of four Technical Education Centres. However, very little has changed in

the past year in regard to the barriers outlined above. School and TAFE fees, transport fees and the lack of affordable and accessible childcare remain significant barriers to participation in education and training.

In addition, at a federal level, there are currently no incentives that exist to encourage employers to offer 21–30 year olds apprenticeship position. This group often misses out, as they are more expensive to employ than their younger counterparts, and the incentives available to offer apprenticeships to older workers do not apply to this age group.

It is also disappointing to note that State Government has drastically reduced the funding available for the Workforce Participation Partnerships program. Whilst Melbourne Citymission welcomes the employment learning coordinator positions introduced through the Neighbourhood Renewal initiatives as well as the initiatives highlighted above, a far greater commitment is required to assist disadvantaged jobseekers to find education and training opportunities in their local communities.

6.6 Providing employment opportunities for the long term unemployed

A significant one in four participants in this year's survey had never had any employment experience in the past, and participants listed a lack of experience as their main barrier to finding employment. Whilst the Commonwealth Government in the past year has implemented a campaign encouraging employers to take on older workers for example, more needs to be done particularly for young disadvantaged jobseekers and those with major barriers to finding work such as a criminal record. Once more, very little has changed from what we stated last year:

Past and current welfare-to-work reforms have focussed on supply side issues within the labour market, that is, how to encourage the unemployed to take up jobs and to some degree improve their skills and capacities to be work ready. Inadequate attention is paid to strategies that encourage and support employers (especially small business) to take on the long-term unemployed. Employers will select the most able and skilled job applicant with minimum costs faced for training, support and capital outlays. A far bigger investment by governments is required to overcome employer barriers, including:

- *discrimination against particular segments of the long term unemployed, such as those with disabilities and new migrants*
- *capital costs of workplace modifications to enable jobseekers with physical disabilities to be employed*
- *need for mentor support to new employees to ensure effective transitions to work and to employers*
- *need for wage subsidies to compensate employers for taking on less productive workers.*

Despite welcome initiatives by both State and Commonwealth Governments in some of these areas, a far greater level of investment is needed to sustain change by employers—particularly targeted at entry-level occupations appropriate to low skilled jobseekers. As an example, the Wage Assist initiative by the Federal Government, as part of welfare-to-work package, only has funding for 5,000 places nationally—equivalent to one or two places annually at each Job Network site.

A well considered advocacy and awareness campaign should be implemented aimed at

changing the behaviour and attitudes of employers to disadvantaged jobseekers.

The long term unemployed with little or no work experience require ongoing support to ensure their long-term attachment to work. It is false economy to allow churning between casual jobs and spells of unemployment comprising repeated participation in mutual obligation activities. Sustainable transitions require continuity of individualised support that includes involvement of the employer to ensure worker retention and productivity. Mentor capacity should be increased through employment assistance programs and targeted mentoring programs to enable support to employers (especially small business) who take on inexperienced jobseekers.

Furthermore, if the federal government is serious about assisting the long-term unemployed to find work, Government ministers must cease perpetuating counterproductive unsubstantiated myths that only serve to further marginalise the long-term unemployed. Comments by Commonwealth Ministers and members of government labelling welfare recipients as ‘professional job avoiders’¹, and ‘welfare cheats’ who are simply “strapping young blokes living in Byron Bay...surfing”² are merely an exercise in political point scoring, and create greater barriers for the long-term unemployed who are trying to find work. They undermine the very real and significant efforts that the vulnerable jobseekers we work with here at Melbourne Citymission are making, as they courageously attempt to overcome the significant barriers they experience such as homelessness, mental illness and poverty.

Instead, Melbourne Citymission urges all levels of government including federal, state and local government to increase the proportion of disadvantaged jobseekers in all levels of the workforce. We also extend this challenge to the community sector, including our own organisation, to set achievable targets to provide employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed.

¹ Comments made by Employment Minister Joe Hockey in April 2007, as reported in the Age on 20th April 2007, “Work Minister targets professional job avoiders”

² Comments made by the member for Ryan, in the House of Representatives on Thursday 15th February 2007.

7. Recommendations

The following set of recommendations to Federal and State Governments is drawn from the previous discussion on the policy implications of this study's main findings.

1. Effective engagement and assessment of barriers to employment
 - 1.1 **Review the JCA assessment process to ensure that vulnerable customers are effectively engaged, assessed and referred.** Clients must be encouraged to fully disclose barriers to employment, to assist Centrelink to make effective referrals to the most appropriate assistance. The assessment process must ensure that vulnerable clients are supported to gather all necessary documentation and that follow up is provided if additional documentation can be gathered.
 - 1.2 **Ensure JCA assessors have the appropriate skills and experience to engage with vulnerable clients and are able to conduct a full and comprehensive assessment of their barriers and personal issues.**
 - 1.3 **Situate all JCAs at Centrelink sites to ensure assessments are accessible for transient and vulnerable clients.**
2. Provision of adequate income support to meet basic needs and to assist employment, education and training transitions
 - 2.1 **Increase Newstart and Youth Allowance income support to ensure disadvantaged jobseekers are able to meet basic needs.**
 - 2.2 **Review the Commonwealth Rent Assistance allowance to ensure jobseekers in private rental have sufficient resources after housing costs, to participate in training and job search activities.**
3. Ensuring Welfare to Work reforms are effective and fair
 - 3.1 **Abolish the current compliance framework and “serious participation failure” of 8 weeks non-payment of income support for disadvantaged jobseekers, as fundamentally inconsistent with the right of all households to adequate income to meet basic needs.** Any assessment of a participation failure must take into account the circumstances surrounding the failure, including significant vulnerabilities such as homelessness.
 - 3.2 **Ensure young people are eligible for financial case management if their payments are suspended.**
 - 3.3 **Uncap the PSP program and eliminate waiting lists to enable eligible clients to commence participation immediately (rapid referral), as applies to the Job Network.**
 - 3.4 **Resource the PSP and JPET programs for brokerage to an equivalent level as available through the Jobseeker Account for Job Network clients.**
 - 3.5 **Ensure that vulnerable jobseekers engaged in support programs such as JPET and PSP are not required to register with a Job Network provider until assessed as ready for open employment by their support worker.**
 - 3.6 **Review the performance requirements on PSP providers to ensure that social outcomes are of equal weighting to employment outcomes.**

4. Integrated assistance to achieve sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers
 - 4.1 **Conduct a comprehensive review of the current employment assistance system, including a rigorous evaluation of the Job Network.** Bring to an end the continuous modifications and additions to the system in the absence of considered evidence based policy making.
 - 4.2 **Address the needs and aspirations of disadvantaged jobseekers by making welfare support simpler and more efficient.** Develop and implement a customised support program for those with significant barriers to work, adopting the principles of joined-up case management, with adequate resources to deliver a coordinated suite of training, work experience, health and welfare support.
 - 4.3 **Review the allocation of funds across the range of targeted programs (eg. Job Network, PSP, JPET) and ensure resources equitably match the level and extent of barriers faced by individual jobseekers.**
 - 4.4 **Implement substantive housing policy reform to increase the supply of low cost housing for disadvantaged job seekers.** This requires collaboration between the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments with the housing industry. Resources to enable 'joined-up' models of assistance that include transitional housing should be included.
5. Participation in education, training and skills development
 - 5.1 **Introduce measures to ensure all fees and charges at public education institutions (schools and TAFE) are waived for disadvantaged students to enable implementation of the Victorian Government's commitment to ensuring full participation of disengaged people in learning.**
 - 5.2 **Provide free public transport to all full time students from disadvantaged backgrounds at secondary and post secondary education institutions.**
 - 5.3 **Increase the availability of affordable childcare to enable sole parents facing financial disadvantage to access training opportunities.**
 - 5.4 **Ensure courses offered in existing secondary and tertiary learning facilities remain relevant to employment opportunities at the local community level.** This should also include a review of the criteria for apprenticeships to ensure they relate more closely to core competencies for particular occupations, and thereby open up participation to more disadvantaged job seekers. Incentives should also be provided to encourage employers to offer apprenticeships to young adults aged 21–30years.
 - 5.5 **Reapply funding taken from the Workforce Participation Partnership program to initiatives that ensure disadvantaged jobseekers are provided with pre-employment support and work opportunities in their local communities.**
6. Providing employment opportunities for the long term unemployed
 - 6.1 **Invest in transitional employment programs with subsidised work opportunities relevant to sustainable employment for the long term unemployed who have spent two spells in the Job Network (Intensive Support Customised Assistance).**
 - 6.2 **Increase the proportion of disadvantaged jobseekers in the public and community sector workforce, by setting achievable targets.**

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Appendix 1

Melbourne Citymission 2007 Employment Chances Survey

Staff use only

Date:

Program:

Location:

Has the client's informed consent been obtained? Yes No

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. We are really interested to find out how people in your position are being affected by current policy changes. Your views will help us to advocate for better services. The survey is **completely confidential** and we do not need your name or any other identifying information. The answers you give will have no effect on the assistance you get now or in the future.

Q.1 What is your age?(years)

Q.2 Your gender? *(please tick one box)*

Female Male

Q.3 What kind of assistance were you looking for when you **came to** Melbourne Citymission?
(tick as many boxes as applies to you)

- Accommodation/ housing support
- Assistance to obtain/ maintain benefit/
- Pension/ government allowance
- Employment & training assistance
- Financial assistance/ food assistance/
material aid
- Financial counselling & support
- General counselling & support
- Help with living skills/ personal development
- Pregnancy &/or parenting support
- Family planning support
- Drug/ alcohol support
- Assistance with legal issues/ court support
- Advice/ information
- Disability services
- Recreation
- Other: *(please specify)*.....

Q.4 What is your family status? (please tick one box)

- Single (please go to Q.5)
 - Single parent/ pregnant
 - Couple with kids
 - Couple no kids (please go to Q.5)
-

If you have children, how many do you have that you are responsible for?
.....

How old is each child?

- Child 1: (years)
- Child 2: (years)
- Child 3: (years)
- Child 4: (years)
- Child 5: (years)

Q.5 Where are you living at the moment? (please tick just **one** box)

- Staying with family/friends rent free
- Staying with family/friends paying rent
- Private rental property
- Public housing
- Community housing
- Own/ purchasing home
- Boarding in a private home
- Hostel/ rooming house
- Hotel/ motel
- Emergency accommodation/ refuge
- Caravan park
- Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat
- Other (please specify)

Q.6 How long have you been staying in this accommodation? (please tick just **one** box)

- One day
- 2-7 days
- 1-2 weeks
- 3-4 weeks
- 1-2 months
- 3-6 months
- 7-12 months
- More than 1 year

Q.7 When was the last time you had a home – somewhere you felt safe and secure to live? (please tick just one box)

- Now
- Within the last week
- Within the last month
- Within the last year
- Longer than a year ago
- Never

Q.8 What is the highest level of education you have completed? (please tick just one box)

- Still at Secondary School
- Left school before Year 8
- Left school, but completed Year 9
- Left school, but completed Year 10
- Left school, but completed Year 11
- Completed Year 12
- Trade/ apprenticeship qualification
- Degree/diploma/ other tertiary course
- Other (please specify)

Q.9 What is your main form of income? (please tick just one box)

- No income
- Newstart allowance
- Youth allowance
- Austudy/ABSTUDY
- Disability support pension
- Parenting payment
- Other type of allowance or benefit
- Workcover/ compensation
- Maintenance/ Child support
- Wages/ Salary/ Own business
- Partner's income
- Other (please specify).....

Q.10 What best describes your work history? (please tick just one box)

- Never worked but looking
- Casual work
- Regular part-time work
- Regular full-time work
- Not in workforce
(e.g. poor health, looking after children,
caring for family member, fulltime study)

Q.11 Are you currently working? (please tick one box)

- Yes (please go to Q.16)
- No, but looking (please go to Q.12)

No & not looking



If you are not currently working and not looking for work, why?

Caring for children

Caring for partner

Caring for other family member

Voluntary work

Full-time study

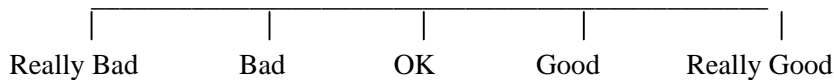
Poor health

Other: *(please specify)*.....

(Please go to Q.16)

Q.12 How long have you been looking for work? (months)

Q.13 What do you think the chances are of you getting work within the next 3 months? *(please circle on the scale below)*



Q.14 What difficulties do you face trying to find work?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.15 (a) What would help you find work? *(please list as many as you can think of)*

.....

.....

.....

(b) What have you found helpful in the past? *(please list as many as you can think of)*

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.16 Have you participated in any employment or training programs within the last 2 years? *(please tick one box)*

Yes

No

(Please go to Q.17)



If yes, what programs?

PSP

JPET

Job Network Programs

Vocational Training (eg.TAFE)

Other: (please specify).....

If you answered yes above, how helpful were the programs in helping you to find work? (please circle on the scale below)



Very unhelpful | Unhelpful | Sort of helpful | Helpful | Very helpful



Why?

.....
.....
.....

Q.17 Do you currently receive or have you received in the past 12 months assistance/ income from Centrelink? (income support/ employment assistance) (please tick one box)

Yes

No (Please go to Q.22)

Q.18 Have you been transferred to a different type of Centrelink payment over the past 12 months?

Yes

No (Please go to Q.19)

Why?

What impact did this have on your life?

Q.19 Have you had your income reduced in the last 12 months, as a result of paying back a loan to Centrelink or an overpayment?

Yes
 No (Please go to Q.20)

(b) Why?
.....
.....

(c) What impact did this have on your life?
.....
.....
.....

Q.20 Have you been issued with a **Participation Failure** in the past 12 months? (This is a **warning** that Centrelink gives if you haven't met their participation requirements).

Yes
 No (Please go to Q.21)

Why?
.....
.....

What impact did this have on your life?
.....
.....

Q.21 Have you received a **Serious Participation Failure** (i.e. had your payments stopped) in the past 12 months?

Yes
 No (Please go to Q.22)

(b) Why?
.....

(c) How long were your payments stopped?

(d) What impact did this have on your life?

- Impact on education, training & looking for work?
.....
.....
.....

- Impact on health/ mental health?
.....
.....
.....

- Impact on affording basic necessities – food, bills, transport, rent?

.....
.....
.....

- Impact on family and dependants?

.....
.....
.....

- Any other impacts?

.....
.....
.....

(e) How did you pay for necessities?

.....
.....

(f) How did you get back on your payments?

.....
.....
.....

Q.22 Thinking about 12 months from now, what do you hope to be doing? (this may include work, study, training, living arrangements, goals etc)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for filling out this survey! It will really help us to improve our services for people seeking assistance in the future.

Appendix 2

Melbourne Citymission 2007 Employment Chances Survey Instructions for Support Workers/ Interviewers

Purpose:

This survey seeks to find out how Melbourne Citymission clients are currently being affected by policies regarding employment assistance and income support, in particular the **Welfare to Work** changes. Participants will be asked basic background questions, some questions about their work history and future aspirations, and questions regarding their experiences with Centrelink. *The findings will help us to advocate for better services for clients.*

Client Eligibility:

Clients can be asked to take part if they meet **any** of the following criteria:

are unemployed and looking for work; and/or

have received income from Centrelink which is subject to mutual obligation requirements or have been interviewed for job capacity over the past 12 months; and/or

have tried to obtain or are receiving employment assistance from the Job Network or other support services, including PSP and JPET over the past 12 months; and/or

are planning to seek work or obtain employment assistance within the next 6 months.

Method:

The survey is to be conducted in a two-week period between **Monday 30th April and Friday 11th May 2007.**

Interviewers should ask clients to participate by verbally explaining the survey and providing the information sheet. Verbal consent to participate should be obtained prior to conducting the survey. No identifying information should be recorded on the survey form. The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. On completion of the questionnaire, clients are to be paid \$10 (voucher or cash) to reimburse expenses.

Participants may complete the survey themselves or with assistance from the interviewer. If the participant requests assistance to fill out the survey, it is important that you record answers as fully and accurately as possible. Whenever possible report the respondent's own words. If paraphrasing is necessary, then document the meaning of their answers clearly. Do not interpret their meaning—record accurately using their language. Please also write clearly to make data entry easier.

Procedure:

Mention the survey to *eligible clients* at an appropriate time.

Verbally explain the survey to interested clients and give them a copy of the '*information sheet for participants*'.

Before starting the survey, *reassure the client about confidentiality* and obtain their verbal consent.

If the client indicates they would like to answer the survey independently, give them a copy of the survey and ask them to answer all questions carefully. Let them know that you are available for any queries or concerns they may have. If the client indicates that they would like assistance to complete the survey, find a private, quiet location to complete the survey together. Conduct the interview, recording answers clearly and fully on the questionnaire. If necessary, explain specific questions, but use neutral language—*do not prompt answers*. You may clarify what an item is asking, or how to make a response, but do not suggest a response.

On completion of the survey, *check all questions have been answered*. Thank the participant for their help and give them the \$10 payment.

Debriefing:

Although the survey does not include personal questions, it may raise issues of a personal nature for clients. Please be sensitive to the client's attitude and state of mind during the interview. Be available to answer any questions they may have during or at the completion of the survey. If necessary, ensure that the client is able to talk to someone after completing the survey if they need to discuss any concerns from the survey.

Completed forms:

At the end of the survey period, please give all completed surveys to your coordinator/manager to arrange forwarding to RSPU.

Any Problems?

Please contact Lucinda Jordan (8625 4458) at the Research & Social Policy Unit (RSPU) if you have any problems or queries about the survey.

Many thanks for your valuable time in helping to conduct this survey.

Appendix 3

Melbourne Citymission 2007 Employment Chances Survey Information for Participants

This survey is being conducted by Melbourne Citymission to find out how people in your position are being affected by current policy changes. Your views are really important and they will help Melbourne Citymission to advocate for better services.

If you choose to take part, you will be asked some general background questions, some questions about your work history and some questions about your experiences with Centrelink.

The survey is **completely confidential** and we do not need your name or any other identifying information. The answers you give will have *no effect* on the assistance you get now or in the future.

If you have any concerns about this survey, please discuss them with the support worker/ interviewer who gave you this survey.

If you agree to take part, it is very important that you think about each question carefully and answer as accurately and fully as you can. Please answer every question—if you are unsure about a question, please ask.

This survey will only take about 10 minutes. On completion you will be compensated with a payment of \$10 for your time and travel costs etc.

Many thanks for your valuable information



Melbourne Citymission
Building Inclusive Communities