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## **No home, no letter, no job**

**PAUL, 17, was sent a letter by Centrelink telling him to attend a Job Network appointment.**

But Paul was homeless and didn't get the letter.

He missed the appointment and his welfare payments were suspended.

He called Centrelink to explain but was told being homeless was "no excuse".

Paul's story is not an isolated one and Centrelink needs to rethink how it keeps in touch with its clients.

Melbourne Citymission staff are hearing of more cases like Paul's as Federal Government welfare reforms start to bite.

There is no doubt Australia is experiencing an economic boom, but the statistics don't tell the whole story.

Take the latest data on unemployment benefits. The Federal Government announced that the number of Australians receiving unemployment benefits had dropped by 3.2 per cent since February 2006.

Minister for Workforce Participation Sharman Stone says the decline in the number of people on welfare is because of the "strong performance" of Welfare to Work reforms.

But, as Paul's story shows, not all of those people found their way into employment.

Some 7500 people have been forcibly removed from the welfare system over the past nine months for failing to comply with the Government's mutual obligation requirements.

It is not known how many reapplied for income support following their eight-week suspension.

Another 56,000 people have been classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as "discouraged jobseekers".

These are people who are "marginally attached" to the labour market. They are people who want to work, but they are not actively looking for work because they have become disillusioned.

These people are not eligible for income support, so they don't show up on Centrelink's books.

Unemployment may be at a 32-year low, but the reality is that for young, marginalised jobseekers such as Paul and many long-term unemployed, the prospect of work remains elusive.

Youth unemployment remains a significant social issue. The percentage of young people not in full-time study, or work, has declined slightly but is still higher than it was in 2000.

Disadvantaged jobseekers have to negotiate employment assistance and income support provisions so complex, they seem designed for failure.

They fail to provide an integrated package of assistance that helps disadvantaged jobseekers gain the life skills to tackle the personal issues that affect their ability to work.

As the first anniversary of Welfare to Work approaches, it's time for a workplace revolution that takes care of our most marginalised jobseekers and offers them real pathways out of poverty and exclusion.

**ANNE TURLEY is CEO of Melbourne Citymission**