



Youth & Unemployment

Making ends meet when you're unemployed in Australia

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The Australian Federal Government announced in early March 2003 that unemployment rates had fallen to six percent nationally; however perhaps the more interesting figures, are those concealed within that average.

Take for example the youth-jobless rate sitting at an alarming twenty-two percent. In February 2003, sixty-six thousand 15–19-year-olds were confirmed as seeking full-time work, with one-hundred-and-fifty-thousand attempting to secure part-time opportunities.

Clearly these statistics are food-for-thought for young Australian residents seeking employment; but more particularly so for those seeking to expand their career through an overseas assignment—where jobseekers will have “make do” without the financial safety net of the government’s various employment assistance programs. In most cases an individual will have to have lived in Australia for two years to be considered for the student allowances and unemployment and sickness benefits afforded to permanent residents. A “Special Benefit” payment available to those in dire need due to changed circumstances beyond their control is available; although the government’s website strictly reinforces that the “inability to find a job” and “running out of money” are not sufficient reasons to qualify for the benefit.

The unfortunate flip side of a successful, enriching career can be a frustrating, stressful, and depressing job search that gradually erodes confidence and money—especially for school-leavers with little in the way of experience and skills. To combat the significant cultural, social, and financial implications of a high youth jobless rate in Australia, the Federal Government has introduced several initiatives that young job seekers should be aware of:

The Job Network www.jobsearch.gov.au

The Job Network is a government-sponsored partnership linking a network of private and community organisations across two-thousand locations Australia-wide. Individuals under the age of twenty-one are permitted access to the numerous support services available, and do not have to qualify for this help by showing eligibility for social security from the country’s “Centrelink” service. Job Network monitors and actively seeks employer assistance in exposing hidden job vacancies and actively helps the job seeker through skills and qualifications matching.

“Centrelink” <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/>

Australia’s hub of social security—Centrelink, can be a goldmine of information for young job seekers both in Australia and abroad. Centrelink offers language programs, career counselling, migrant services and more.

The Newstart Allowance

The Newstart Allowance is available for unemployed Australian residents aged 21 or over, who satisfy asset and income test restrictions and are willing to commit to job seeking criteria. Successful applicants receive a two-weekly Newstart Allowance and a Health Care Card, and may also receive rent assistance, remote area allowances, pharmaceutical allowances and telephone funding.

Work for the Dole Program (details available at <http://www.workplace.gov.au/>)

In an effort to restore job seeker confidence, arrest a culture of despair, and expand the skills of the long-term unemployed, the Federal Government introduced the Work for the Dole program in 1997. The program offers individuals on unemployment benefits (more colloquially referred in Australia as “the dole”) six-month’s work on community and other projects consisting of two-days work a week in return for a range of training benefits and continued unemployment payments.

The program, according to government brochures, was based on a “philosophy of mutual obligation and to encourage the development of a positive work culture.”

Individuals aged between 18–20 years are expected to participate for 24-hours every two-weeks; those aged 21–39 for 30-hours every two-weeks, and 40+ job seekers for 12-hours every two-weeks. Activities can include caring for people at community centres, lending a hand in community-based construction projects, assisting with natural disaster efforts, participating in environmental research and field-work projects, recording local history, and more.

Once training is complete, job seekers are provided with an \$800 training credit to build skills further, and are presented with the “Passport to Employment”—a package of assistance to help with job searches, résumé preparation, job applications, and interview tips.

Yet despite the Federal Government’s enthusiasm for the project, dissenters have been vocal. On February 5, 2003, Australia’s Melbourne-based newspaper “The Age” www.theage.com.au quoted findings of a report released by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) indicating that “two-thirds of people who take part in the work-for-the-dole scheme did not go on to find work.” ACOSS’ President reportedly found that the program was “poorly designed and under-funded” and that “it is basically a compliance program to keep people busy” a statement strongly denied at the time by Community Service Minister, Senator Amanda Vanstone.

Robust community debate on the “Work for the Dole” has continued unabated since its inception in 1997, yet consensus has been reached that the program’s success relies heavily on the attitude of young people and their willingness to become involved, stay with the schedule to learn and contribute, and amass not only technical job skills, but team-spirit, communications, and discipline.

Where to look for work:

Job vacancies are advertised in:

- Centrelink outlets
- Job Network offices
- Internet: www.jobsearch.gov.au
- Employment agencies
- Employer websites
- Local and national newspapers in Positions Vacant, Situations Vacant and Professional Employment sections
- Magazines

While many believe that the increased emphasis on training and education espoused by the Australian government as simply delaying the inevitable surges in youth unemployment, it is undeniable that young job seekers in Australia today face an ever-depleting scope of entry-level opportunities, and an ever-increasing drive by employers who demand greater levels of skill, maturity and knowledge. To this end, training and education are critical components in preparing young people for the challenges they face in entering the workforce.

Notwithstanding the alarming unemployment statistics, hope exists for young people to contribute to the community through a range of government and employer-sponsored programs and schemes. A positive attitude, coupled with knowledge and education, can help redefine the job seekers’ sense of self and redirect it to meet an employer’s expectations so that significant rewards can be achieved. Young job seekers need to sustain the spark of interest and eagerness no matter how long their search, that will see them engage enthusiastically with those attempting to help them in achieving the best results.

About Gayle Howard

Gayle Howard is the first Australian to be awarded dual certifications as a Certified Professional Resume Writer (CPRW) and a Certified Resume Writer (CRW). She is also Australia’s first Credentialed Career Master (CCM). Her work has been featured in 8 career books internationally and she is the author of "PS You Need a Resume!" available for purchase at www.topmargin.com