



# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

## Helping displaced older workers get back into employment

### INTRODUCTION

This good practice guide is based on research conducted by Victor J Callan and Kaye Bowman presented in their report *Industry restructuring and job loss: helping older workers get back into employment*. The aim of the research was to identify evidence-based practices that led to successful skills transfer, re-skilling, training and the attainment of new jobs for older workers displaced from often lower-skilled jobs in the manufacturing industries.

The displaced worker group is an enduring and currently growing segment of the Australian workforce, and is a consequence of globalisation and increased competition. In the past, Australia has seen restructuring in many high-profile businesses, especially those in its manufacturing sector, for example, BHP Steel and Mitsubishi Motors, and more recently, General Motors Holden, Ford and Toyota.

Based on a review of past research and four Australian case studies, Callan and Bowman investigated the type and impact of the approaches used to assist displaced older workers in regions where industry restructuring has occurred.

The case studies were in the Hunter region of New South Wales, the Geelong region in Victoria, the outer metropolitan area of Adelaide in South Australia and various locations in Tasmania. They highlighted that there are major challenges for unemployed older workers in industries where larger proportions of the workforce have lower skills, few formal qualifications and poorer literacy and numeracy skills. Finding a new job is not easy for many displaced workers and the probability of being re-employed is much lower for older lower-skilled displaced workers than for other retrenched workers.

This good practice guide is based on the report *Industry restructuring and job loss: helping older workers get back into employment* by Victor J Callan and Kaye Bowman, and can be downloaded from [www.ncver.edu.au](http://www.ncver.edu.au)

## GOOD PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

This good practice framework is for employers, employment placement agencies and related support services, training providers and overall coordinating agencies (where there is one) to inform the design of programs that help displaced older workers find new jobs. The framework combines the good practices identified from past research and those found in the four case studies.

Underpinning the framework is a set of working principles that encapsulate the key characteristics of displaced older workers.

### Underpinning principles

- Implement interventions early and understand that it will take time for older workers to make future plans and execute them<sup>1</sup>

*‘Early intervention is critical. It helps to stop these workers from becoming the long-term unemployed with a chip on both shoulders and feeling that no one is really interested in them’.*

*(Transitions support worker, Mitsubishi Motors)*

- Use age- and experience-appropriate advisors who can connect with and respect older workers
- Partner with key agencies to provide a holistic approach<sup>2</sup>
- Recognise the health risks linked with job displacement

*‘When guys lose their jobs – when their sense of self-worth is taken from them – there is an element of guilt and shame. Consequently, they often lose confidence and suffer from a mental health issue’.*

*(Transitions support worker, Tasmania)*

- Be aware of low levels of literacy – including computer literacy – and numeracy skills.

### Examples

<sup>1</sup> The BHP Steelworks’ Pathways Program was established in 1997 well before the actual closure of the steelworks in 1999, giving BHP time to work with unions, the community and state and federal governments to develop initiatives that would assist workers to make a positive transition.

<sup>2</sup> In Tasmania, Rural Alive and Well (RAW) operates to provide counselling and outreach assistance 24/7. RAW’s outreach managers work with displaced workers individually to identify their skills, help them write their resumés, fill out paperwork (particularly if their literacy skills are low), arrange for job interviews and provide them with transport if required. In this way, RAW provides a holistic suite of services to help displaced workers, in particular linking services such as Centrelink, Job Services Australia, the Salvation Army, ForestWorks and the men’s sheds.



## Framework stages

The framework specifies the practices according to the following three stages:

- pre-training
- training
- post-training follow-up.

Under each of these stages the key practices include the tasks identified from the literature review and the four case studies.

Each of the discrete tasks in the framework focuses on a specific aspect of assistance that may be required. It is not expected that any one displaced worker would access every specific intervention. Rather, the framework of initiatives would be tailored to meet the background, needs and preferences of individual displaced workers.

The mechanisms for executing the key practices were found in use across the four case studies.

## STAGE 1 PRE-TRAINING: ADVICE, CAREER PLANNING, SCREENING FOR TRAINING

### Key practices

- Provide information early detailing the full range of support services the workers may require, and how and when they can access the services<sup>1</sup>
- Give information about local labour market opportunities
- Provide access to career advisors, and exploration and assessment tools
- Offer specific new industry taster programs<sup>2</sup>
- Showcase local growth-industry sectors
- Where possible, assess the existing work and life skills of older workers while they are still employed using specialist career advisors
- Advise on training courses that help prepare for new jobs
- Help workers to identify transferable skills and complete recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessments<sup>3</sup>
- Help workers prepare a personal transition plan based on the above.

### Examples

<sup>1</sup> The Tasmanian Forestry Workers Assistance Service, a federally funded initiative run by ForestWorks, was established in 2012 to deliver specialised training and employment related services to retrenched Tasmanian forestry workers. The service assisted displaced workers by providing them with information about the job market, personal evaluations, a skills audit, as well as intensive, personal and ongoing support.

<sup>2</sup> The Jobs 4 Geelong Front Foot series assists displaced or soon-to-be displaced mature-aged men to learn about industry sectors in the Geelong region that are likely to be jobs growth areas in the coming years. The half-day sessions on each industry involve a speaker who provides an overview of the industry area, as well as a local employer and employee from the industry who provide more details and insights into the industry and the potential career opportunities available.

<sup>3</sup> ACL Bearings in Tasmania, which closed at the end of June 2014, helped its employees move to new careers by providing them with the opportunity to have their existing skills formally recognised through the RPL process. The Work Lab, in conjunction with one Tasmanian and two interstate registered training organisations, jointly provided the RPL service. The skills transfer and RPL process used Work Lab's specialist software, SkillsBook. This provided an end-to-end assessment during which each employee built their personal skills profile and explored new career pathways using the skills gained both at ACL and externally.

## Mechanisms for executing the practices

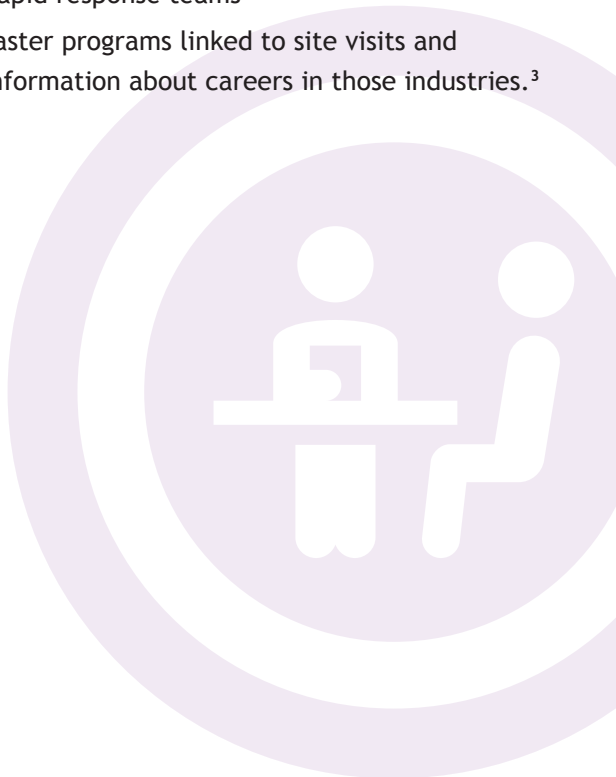
- One-stop worker transition and development centres<sup>1</sup>
- Industry groups for showcasing
- Worker transition coordinators/specialist career advisors/skills recognition experts
- Rapid response teams<sup>2</sup>
- Taster programs linked to site visits and information about careers in those industries.<sup>3</sup>

## Examples

<sup>1</sup> DOME in South Australia, a dedicated one-stop service for mature-aged workers seeking employment, provides free career advice and employment services, accredited training services and tailored assistance to mature-aged employees. DOME uses volunteers to supplement its resources, enabling the organisation to provide more one-on-one assistance to mature-aged workers.

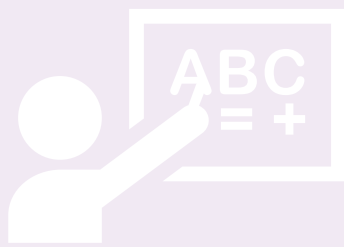
<sup>2</sup> In the past 15 years several prominent companies in the Hunter Region have closed, leaving many workers displaced. The Hunter Rapid Response Team works collaboratively in instances of business closures or downsizing. This coordinated inter-agency model involves gathering intelligence on pending company closures or downsizing, seeking information from the business about their plans for retraining or redeployment of employees, meeting with the company to identify job losses, and capturing upfront the skill set of any potentially redundant workers. Actions that might follow for the displaced workers include information sessions, identifying employee skill sets and training needs, and providing access to a training coordinator whose role is designing case management services for the displaced workers.

<sup>3</sup> In an industry taster program organised by the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (GRLLEN) for displaced Qantas and Forstaff employees at the Avalon airport, the workers were given a taste of community services through visits to organisations in the sector. During each site visit a mature-aged male employee with a blue-collar work background spoke to the workers displaced from the Avalon airport about how they came to be in the community services sector and how their experience had been. Following the tour, participants were offered career counselling sessions with a mature-aged male career counsellor.



### Key practices

- Screen workers prior to training to ensure that the program is right for the worker and the worker is capable of handling the content of the training<sup>1</sup>
- Modify training to acknowledge workers' life and work experiences
- Provide ample time to learn, with good levels of support and feedback
- Allow age group learning at an individual pace with flexible instruction
- Use highly experiential approaches, that is, hands-on practical training in workplace-like environments
- Include practical skills on job search, resumé writing, networking and interviewing as part of the training
- Provide extra assistance to those with low literacy and numeracy skills through life skills courses<sup>2</sup>
- Use training in groups to promote learning together and support.



### Mechanisms for executing the practices

- Registered training organisations should, where possible, involve the workers in training design and development to ensure appropriate customisation in relation to content and delivery.<sup>3</sup>

### Examples

<sup>1</sup> In 1994, ADI Ltd (now Thales Australia) was awarded a contract to build six Italian-designed Minehunter vessels at their Newcastle shipbuilding facility and maintain them until 2004. As a condition of the government-provided funding, ADI was required to engage with the Hunter Institute of TAFE to purchase training for unemployed workers, many of whom had lost their jobs after the closure of the BHP Steelworks in 1999. Hunter TAFE undertook a skills audit to determine the skills required to construct the Minehunter vessels and identified skills shortages. Hunter TAFE then commenced a pre-training program for 300 unemployed people, including many of the displaced BHP Steelworks workers, who were trained in traditional shipbuilding courses and also in the other trades necessary for building and maintaining the vessels. These individuals were subsequently employed by ADI and were also provided with on-the-job training while working on the Minehunters. The training program was conducted like an apprenticeship, with Hunter TAFE trainers working alongside the trainees to help them develop their skills.

<sup>2</sup> When the BHP Steelworkers were retrenched, many were in their late 40s and 50s. Under the Pathways Program they were encouraged to access a range of 'life skills' courses run by Hunter TAFE. Some of these programs were new and designed specifically with these retrenched workers in mind. The premise of many of these life skills courses was that a proportion of the older displaced workers would not be looking for a new job. However, by undertaking these courses, they would be able to manage small jobs and not have to pay for others to do them. These life skills courses included DIY jobs, home renovation, servicing a vehicle, basic welding, basic plumbing and eating to a budget. However, after completing these courses, some of the displaced workers developed their own cottage industries, working for themselves.

<sup>3</sup> Hunter TAFE used a skills shortage list to create a range of 12-week 'taster' courses for BHP displaced workers in various trades and industries. Catering specifically for these displaced workers, all of the 12-week courses included a section on resumé writing, occupational health and safety, first aid and a session facilitated by a counsellor on workplace change.

Following completion of the courses, the displaced worker could then enrol in another 12-week course in a different discipline. Many of the courses were focused on re-skilling the workers to enable them to obtain a job in the coal mines or power plants in the Hunter region. Many trained in computer programming and software, as in 1999 this was viewed as a burgeoning industry. A unique and beneficial part of the training courses was that many of them included site visits. These provided the displaced workers with an opportunity to introduce themselves to other employers, which led to many obtaining employment.

## STAGE 3 POST-TRAINING: EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE AND ONGOING MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### Key practices

- Encourage use of volunteering as a step towards winning a job<sup>1</sup>
- Provide job search assistance via the internet, the workers' own networks and through cold-calling other prospective employers
- Help workers with resumé writing and specific job cover letter preparation that highlights relevant transferable skills

*'The woman I met there appeared to have all the time in the world for me. She 'crowbarred' out of me my work story and wrote it up into a resumé that I was most happy with and could not have written myself. I also did a rehearsal interview with her around generic questions likely to be asked. I did okay in the interview but did not get the job due to a lack of appropriate hands-on experience.'* (Ex-Ford worker, Geelong)
- Coach workers in job interview techniques and active self-marketing
- Continue to provide career advice and training to minimise the likelihood of long-term unemployment<sup>2</sup>
- Support workers and their families to relocate to other areas, if necessary, where job opportunities exist
- Undertake job-creation initiatives to expand local job opportunities
- Encourage workers to engage with each other and human service professionals to build their resilience
- Introduce ways to monitor displaced workers' progress (for example, the number of contacts workers make, the value of each contact, and whether these contacts are in a position to provide job-related information)
- Measure success in terms of how many get a new job and what displaced workers regard as a good job
- Promote stories that illustrate successful outcomes with the aim of motivating others to achieve similar results.

### Examples

<sup>1</sup> The Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network has implemented job clubs, which involve regular meetings of mature-aged retrenched workers sharing information and building social connections. Linked to these activities are opportunities for volunteering as a step towards a job. Volunteering is seen by its advocates as providing opportunities to get a taste of a potential work role for those unsure of whether the type of work in which they're volunteering is right for them or for those without relevant experience who are struggling to get a permanent job. In the Geelong region, workers were accessing community organisations such as Volunteering Geelong.

<sup>2</sup> During BHP Steelworks' wind-down phase, a Centrelink office was opened on site and for the first seven weeks when the demand for services was at a maximum it was opened from 7am to 5pm. Access to specialist services was available as required.

The Centrelink office at BHP provided a one-stop shop for BHP employees who were to be retrenched. Employees were able to lodge claims and establish eligibility for assistance prior to becoming unemployed and access other forms of assistance for which they would become eligible because of their changed personal or family circumstances. The Centrelink office also ran a seminar program to provide early advice to employees of the impact of their redundancy payments on income support payments. Options, such as retirement or other employment, were also discussed.

## Mechanisms for executing the practices

- Local workshops/career days/site visits to firms/ regional databases to showcase current job opportunities<sup>1</sup>
- Job clubs and other social events to keep workers engaged and motivated
- Regional retrenched worker databases for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

## Examples

<sup>1</sup> 'Skills in the Hunter', a website to promote local skills and create local job opportunities, was created by the NSW Department of Trade and Investment in partnership with HunterNet and Regional Development Australia Hunter. People looking for work in the Hunter region can register their details on the website free of charge, create a profile and resumé, search for jobs, note down jobs they are interested in, and receive the details of recommended jobs that fit their preferences. It also allows employers looking for employees to register, create a profile, advertise their jobs or vacancies and connect with skilled and experienced candidates in Hunter.

## HOW DO THE PROGRAMS WORK?

The value of a worker transition coordinator or agency to case-manage the entire process is another key success factor that has been identified. This requires effective partnerships with the organisations offering the various services and to identify mechanisms to achieve the following:

- a common agenda – with a shared vision and understanding of the key challenges and agreed actions
- shared measurement systems – with transparent key performance indicators and accessible data to track progress
- mutually reinforcing activities – including space for different activities coordinated through a shared action plan
- continuous communication – that aspires to be consistent open communication and builds trust between organisations and with the displaced workers
- governance structures – to include an independent entity with staff possessing the appropriate skills to coordinate the participating organisations and to support implementation of actions to assist displaced workers.

The coordinator of the Ford Transition Program in Geelong emphasised the strong relationships between the Ford HR team, general management, the unions and various outside agencies as a key to success:

*'All parties have the shared objective of helping the workers. The HR team has been supplying workers with their individual job and training profiles. General management has put in its own resources and supported in any way we have asked. The unions have been brilliant at leading the way. The shop stewards have been the first in line for a one-on-one meeting and have encouraged others to make appointments. Many outside agencies have been involved. The Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network has been most helpful in developing customised assistance. The new Workforce Development Centre at the Gordon TAFE has provided a further place where retrenched workers can access a range of services. And all the local training agencies are assisting with skills recognition and training programs, and employment and recruitment agencies with job search.'*

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE VET SECTOR?

The VET sector plays a major role in meeting the nation's demand for the skills required to address continued economic and demographic changes. More than any other education sector, VET is pivotal, as it connects learning with the labour market, the workplace and community development, as well as with individual learner and employer requirements.

In addition, through its regional and community focus the sector has special strengths in responding and providing training and re-training to assist industries and individuals in the most economically vulnerable regions.

VET providers can play a central role in the training of displaced workers<sup>1</sup> through the following activities during all three transition stages:

- Pre-training stage
  - in the skills recognition step and by having a role in upfront career counselling and the development of workers' skills profiles
- Training stage
  - having a major focus on initiatives aimed at designing and delivering age-inclusive training
- Post-training stage
  - through links with employers in terms of employment outcomes, with an emphasis on job outcomes rather than on the development of the training for new skills and knowledge
  - through the provision of relevant training in new areas to facilitate the creation of jobs
  - as key partnership facilitators.

### Example

<sup>1</sup> Hunternet Group Training Company (HGTC) is a registered group training organisation led by the management of manufacturing and engineering companies within the region. HGTC currently manages the training and development program for apprentices and trainees. Using its relationship with Hunter TAFE, HGTC facilitates enrolment of its apprentices with Hunter TAFE, although the apprentices may choose to study elsewhere. Following the success of HGTC, there is much scope for another body like this to work with displaced workers including out-of-work apprentices.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

These findings are based on the following research report published by NCVET:

- *Industry restructuring and job loss: helping older workers get back into employment* by Victor J Callan and Kaye Bowman available at [www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2839.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2839.html)



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