

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers**

Warragul—Wednesday, 11 December 2019

#### **MEMBERS**

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Sarah Connolly

Mr Brad Rowswell

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Theophanous

#### **WITNESSES**

Ms Diane Carson, Project Manager, and

Ms Josie Rose, Project Lead, Quality Teaching and Learning, Strengthening Pathways for Adult Learners in Gippsland; and

Ms Rosemary Allica, Manager, Warragul Community House.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks for attending today. It is a very important inquiry, and we appreciate that you have made the time to be here. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you say it outside or on social media, then you may not be afforded that privilege. Hansard is recording your evidence, and we will provide you with a transcript for you to verify. Now, if you want to give us a 5-minute presentation, then we will ask questions as we go along, if that is all right.

**Ms ALLICA:** Good afternoon, everybody. I am Rosemary Allica. I am Manager of the Warragul Community House. Our focus as a community or neighbourhood house is to connect community with community, particular underachieving jobseekers; that is a main part of our focus. In the last several years we have been involved in the SPALG project, and Di Carson and Josie Rose have been the manager and involved in the project, so I am going to hand over to them to describe that particular project as a way of supporting those jobseekers.

**Ms CARSON:** Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our project with you; we are quite excited about it. SPALG is Strengthening Pathways for Adult Learners in Gippsland. It is funded by the Department of Education and Training and project managed through the Warragul Community House. It has been running for three years. It is a project that focuses on providing place-based education opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers in Gippsland, so Gippsland-wide but also in specific organisations. The courses were co-designed specifically in areas where there were identified skills shortages. The project team work with 23 Learn Locals across Gippsland, funded by the ACFE Board—the Adult, Community and Further Education Board—and part of the Department of Education. The training is specifically targeted at jobseekers, vulnerable workers and adult learners who need to develop core foundation skills for further study and participation in industry. The SPALG Project was designed to address the low participation in training and to reduce the high level of disadvantage in Gippsland. This place-based approach enabled us to work with Learn Local, industry partners and jobactives as well as TAFE to provide interconnected training and employment pathways. The project has been independently evaluated by PTR Consulting and was found to have made a difference in delivering training programs that resulted in employment pathways for participants.

During the past three years we have worked with local industry, including health service providers, disability providers, call centres, construction companies and small local businesses. We have also collaborated with government agencies such as the Latrobe Valley Authority, Regional Development Victoria, the federal Department of Employment and GROW Gippsland. For example, we were invited to speak to the two major bidders in the rail corridor project. The SPALG Project has provided opportunities for individuals to gain employment in entry-level jobs. This model was proven to be successful and should be funded into the future both in Gippsland and in other parts of the state that are experiencing high levels of disadvantage. We have provided you with the toolkit and the course guide that we have developed as part of the project.

**Ms ROSE:** The course guide will give you a list of all the Learn Locals and what they offer across Gippsland, which is quite comprehensive.

**Ms CARSON:** Josie has been the Project Lead, particularly in the developing of the curriculum and the trialling of the courses, so we are going to throw most of the questions to her—we hope!

**Ms ROSE:** I will do my best! Just to explain my role, the reason Di said that was because I was the Operations Manager. We would go out and speak to industry and they would say, ‘What can you do for us?’. And then I would go away and present a model to them, which we would then pull apart and say, ‘Well, these are the bits that we think we need for the people we’re targeting in this particular part of our organisation’. So that is how I ended up doing most of that kind of work.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. The evidence that has been provided is indicating that there are some instances where people are not job ready. Employees are wanting to take on people in long-term unemployment, but they find that they are not job ready. What types of pre-employment skills did you provide to some of your clients?

**Ms ROSE:** The best example of in fact that very thing is—I do not know if you are familiar with it—Aussie Broadband, in the Valley. They are one of the biggest internet providers, I think, across Australia now. They

had a problem where they had a great attrition rate in the young people. They are very community minded, and they wanted to employ people in the Valley, but they had a great attrition rate, only because it was difficult for them to get employees that were job ready. So they called us in, and we worked with them on a program which was very specific. It is customer service, but it is customer service targeted to a job at Aussie Broadband. Our model, we call it the Kickstart model. We look at industry-specific skills and all the other literacies that fall out of that, so we look at digital literacy, financial literacy—it is a huge problem for a lot of young people, they just do not know how to do a budget or work an Excel spreadsheet. And then there is language and literacy that sits with—

The jobactive gives them a résumé, but it is not really a résumé that is ready for a particular industry, so we work with them on that too. We give them mock interviews, and in fact the industry helps us to interview them, and then they get heaps of really good, practical feedback.

Back to Aussie Broadband, we worked with them, and they gave us a really clear idea of what they wanted from an employee, so we put them through a six-week program, four days a week. In our funding we cannot do work experience—the good old work experience that school students do. We can do observational work experience, which is a bit of a challenge because the students really love going on work experience.

**The CHAIR:** What is ‘observational’?

**Ms ROSE:** They can see but they cannot touch! That is a challenge for us, but there are ways we can work around that. That for them, in the six weeks that is what they are working towards. We focus on employability skills. We work with them in terms of, ‘You have to get up every morning and be here at 9 o’clock. We finish at half past two, and this is what we’re doing in those times. If you can’t come, you have to let us know’. So we are starting very often from a very low base. But after the six weeks, the employer has interviewed everybody in the course, and if there are jobs available, they do apply for them. In some cases we have had 100% initial employment. I know that one of the gentlemen who did the very first course with us, he was at his wits’ end in terms of getting a job. He is still there a year later, and he has now been promoted. Certainly in the work that we do there are some incredibly good stories in terms of individuals that do start on the employment pathway.

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** At what point, or how do you identify the businesses that you want to become involved with?

**Ms ROSE:** Yes, good question. That is key, because in our project we were very lucky to have somebody from the Department dedicated to the task. She is based in Gippsland. She works with employers—to find them, to talk to them. Despite the good work that all of the Learn Locals do, it makes a huge difference if you have somebody from the Department who can say, ‘I am Josie. I work at the Department. This is my job. I want to speak to you about how we can look at getting disadvantaged jobseekers into jobs’. That has been a huge part of our success. I think you would agree, ladies?

**Ms CARSON:** Most certainly.

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** From that point then you just start co-designing training courses?

**Ms ROSE:** Yes. Then she calls me and we go there. My background is education. We go in together. We say to them, ‘So this is a model that works for us. What do you think?’. Like Aussie Broadband said, ‘We want digital literacy, but we want it specific to what we do. We want them to be able to type really fast. They need to be able to note-take at a level that is going to keep the manager happy in terms of what happened in his conversation’. So we are really contextualising it for a particular industry.

**Ms RYAN:** So are you teaching skill sets? You are teaching pre-accredited—

**Ms ROSE:** We are not accredited.

**Ms RYAN:** Right. So it is all pre-accredited training.

**Ms ROSE:** So we look at employability skills. We spend a lot of time with them to work with them. They all say, ‘What do I need that for?’, until you kind of drill down to: ‘What is it going to look like to your

employer if your phone isn't charged and you can't send them a text to tell them that you're going to be late?'. So we home in on those very basic employability skills.

**Ms RYAN:** I am guessing, given the program came to a conclusion last year—

**Ms ROSE:** Yes, as we speak.

**Ms CARSON:** As we speak.

**Ms RYAN:** you must have done an evaluation of—

**Ms ROSE:** Yes.

**Ms RYAN:** Do you have the numbers around how many people you have placed who have achieved ongoing employment?

**Ms ROSE:** No, no. The numbers are not there. We are still number-crunching those. But we did have a discussion about that the other day. I think in the main I can give you a percentage: 30% of the people that we have worked with over the past three years have gained employment. As to how many of them are still there, that is destination data, which we will have to look at next year.

**The CHAIR:** Do you know roughly the numbers of that 70%? Is it 100? Is it 50? Is it 20?

**Ms ROSE:** Oh, no. It will be about—I am guessing—I would say about 200.

**Ms CARSON:** It was 179 when we did the destination survey.

**Ms ROSE:** That is correct, yes. That is very true.

**Ms CARSON:** We are still crunching the numbers there and tracking it. So we track straightaway and then we track three months down and then we want to track at six months. Yes, I had forgotten about that.

**Ms RYAN:** So are you reapplying for funding for next year?

**Ms CARSON:** It was a one-off project. So the short answer is we hope we have skilled Learn Locals to be able to take our kickstart curriculum, and we have done some training with them in how to approach industry so that they can take this on themselves. The thing is to make this sustainable. Of course, we would always love more money to continue it, because it has been a really great project.

**Ms ROSE:** And you know, the Learn Locals are Learn Locals. They are funded by DHHS to do a lot of that development, and then many of them do Learn Local on top of that. Many of them are not educationalists; they are community development workers. There is a lot of merit, I think we have proven, in a system like this, where you have people who are expert at what they do, working with an industry. Then my job is also to train up the coordinators and the teachers and work with them and mentor them so that they can actually develop the program themselves.

**The CHAIR:** Well, what we have heard from employers is it is a service that is needed, definitely.

**Ms CARSON:** I think there is a great need for that coordination role within Gippsland because a lot of the Learn Locals are isolated. But to have someone at the end of the phone who can drop in and give advice and help them develop courses specific to their area—that is going to be lost with the end of the program.

**Ms ROSE:** We have just done a construction course, which is the really interesting one. We ended up with only six participants. They were all long-term jobseekers. The teacher said to me, 'I have never seen a lot of students so unmotivated and so broken'; that is when she started the six-week course. When they finished, they were a group, they responded, they were talking—they were actually communicating with each other. We had a lot of industries—from GROW and LVA—help us a lot to get small businesses to come in and tell their story. It gives them hope because they can see, 'Well, if this guy can become a very successful electrician, and he started from a fairly low base, so can I'. But it takes that much for them to get there to do that, and the

coordinator was so inspired by that. She has got a whole new area now that she wants to develop because of this. It was a tremendous collaboration between the Latrobe Valley Authority; the GTLC, which is the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council; and us—and the TAFE in fact. So it has connected up services, which I think is what we need more of to make it work.

**Ms RYAN:** How much funding did you receive over the three years?

**Ms CARSON:** In the last 18 months it was 280.

**Ms ROSE:** It was 280, and the previous one was similar I think—about 300. But that does not pay for the Department person of course. That was for us two.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** That is very interesting. It sounds like in working with people—like you said, the long-term unemployed—the confidence and all the skills are things that sometimes we take for granted. These people felt so broken. But in such a short space of time if you work with people intensively one on one, almost, or in small groups, they are able to flourish.

**Ms ROSE:** Absolutely, yes.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** At little cost really.

**Ms CARSON:** Yes, it is the hand holding that Learn Locals are able to do that TAFEs cannot, and we deal with the people who have fallen between the cracks. So LLENs and those guys are terrific in what they do, but they deal mainly with people who are still in school, still in the system. We are dealing with people who have fallen out of school and have been for some time just lost.

**Ms RYAN:** We often hear that community houses and neighbourhood houses are a less intimidating space—

**Ms ROSE:** Very much so.

**Ms RYAN:** for people, particularly if you have got to make a choice. You know, some people are intimidated by a TAFE campus. Has that been your experience for program participants?

**Ms ROSE:** Absolutely. Having said that, in Sale, where we do not have a lot of options, and in Wellington, in terms of where we can go to deliver things, we often deliver at the Fulham campus. That is a problem because students have to travel, and they do not have transport and things like that. So venues can be across Gippsland an issue in terms of finding ones that have got the facilities we need. But I think because our courses are pre-accredited, you do not have the same sort of assessment burden. Even within a TAFE campus, we can deliver a pre-accredited course very effectively, as we have shown with the construction one.

**Ms CARSON:** And pre-accredited has a really important place in the education spectrum for that very reason. We can take people, and research shows that people do three or four pre-accredited courses often before they all move on, which is why this has been such an outstanding project to get them in and moved on to employment. But that is to build the confidence, the self-esteem and the knowledge that they can move on, and then we happily move them on to TAFE or to employment. So it is a really important step for those people who have fallen.

**Ms ALLICA:** A Learn Local provides an opportunity for people to come in and develop skills at their own pace, because there is no formal exam or assessment at the end of it. So it is, 'I can have a go. I will be okay, because I do not have to prove myself at the end'. Learn Locals are able to offer that to a huge range of people that are really actually hard to find and make contact with, because they are the ones that stay home, that are not on social media, that do not go to a group somewhere. They do not go to work somewhere. They are actually very difficult to find. So the SPALG Project has been able to help us make those links across to industry and across to a whole range of other places and to get all the Learn Locals working cooperatively with this to develop the courses, because Learn Locals are pretty busy delivering most of the time. So the project has helped connect and redevelop so that the quality of the courses has gone up a significant number of notches, and they have been deliberately targeted to employers too.

**Ms ROSE:** In here you will find Wayne. When Carter Holt Harvey closed down he needed to completely retrain, and he actually came and did the hospital course—no, he did not do the hospital course—and then he went on to do an accredited course in health services assistance. So he went through the whole project with us. He did do a pre-accredited course, and then we supported him in order to finish that accredited training. He is now happily working at Latrobe Regional Hospital. So it does work, and pre-accredited places are an incredibly important part of that. There are some statistics, which I do not have, to show that students who have done a pre-accredited course before they do an accredited course have a much better completion rate than those who do not.

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** So what percentage of those you have helped would be classified as retrenched workers, like Wayne?

**Ms ROSE:** From the Valley?

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** Yes.

**Ms ROSE:** Do you know, Di?

**Ms CARSON:** Not off the top of my head.

**Ms ROSE:** No, I do not think—

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** No, that is okay. I am just interested to know how many—

**Ms ROSE:** Because they have got their own programs.

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** Yes, you said.

**The CHAIR:** So we had an Aboriginal elder give evidence earlier on in the morning, and she spoke about pre-employment support for Aboriginal communities. Can you just talk a little bit about that—the cultural sensitivities that are attached to, obviously, Aboriginal communities?

**Ms ROSE:** In the four years that I have been here, we do get people that identify as Aboriginal in some of our courses—not many unfortunately. Certainly in the hospital, Central Gippsland Health, they have always been really keen to involve Aboriginal students, and we have had some in there. I did do some work with GEGAC in Bairnsdale and in fact developed a course that was very much based on our model, but they decided that, for the very reason of cultural sensitivity, they wanted to take it in-house in terms of the delivery of it. So I am very keen to work with them. In fact I hear, through another project, that they are looking at becoming a Learn Local, and if that is the case, then that would be a great way, I think, for them to deliver a similar course to their community.

**Ms RYAN:** Do you find public transport to be much of a barrier?

**Ms ROSE:** Yes.

**Ms RYAN:** I mean, it is probably exacerbated even further in Gippsland because it is such a big region and quite fragmented in lots of ways. I know this is a very broad question, but is there anything that can be done to assist disadvantaged jobseekers in particular in gaining access to services like yours in terms of public transport?

**Ms ROSE:** Absolutely. They need to be able to access it when they need it and how they need it. And I know that the jobactives—

We have done a lot of work with the jobactives. When we ran our course in Fulham—which is how many kilometres, 15, 20 kilometres, out of Sale?—the jobactives actually paid for a taxi for them to come. So we need more of that kind of service—very accessible transport options for them so that that is not a barrier. There is a young woman who taught the call centre course. We used to just go and pick them up, and that is fabulous that she does that but that is not sustainable.

**Ms RYAN:** Reliant on the goodwill.

**Ms ROSE:** Yes, and there has got to be other ways that we can do that. Maybe the course comes with a transport voucher if they need it—something like that, something that is easy—because if we make it too difficult or with too many forms to fill in, if they cannot fill in forms, it is not going to happen.

**Ms ALLICA:** These people have low literacy and numeracy, and the first thing you ask them to do is fill in a complex form. It is really—

**Ms ROSE:** It has got to be very accessible.

**Ms ALLICA:** It is not only hard for them; it is off-putting for them in terms of their self-confidence because they are faced with something difficult almost straightaway that is difficult for them.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for attending. We appreciate it very much.

**Ms ROSE:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**Witnesses withdrew.**