

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

Ballarat—Wednesday, 23 October 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 Hayley McArthur, Multicultural Youth Worker,

Ms Lamourette Folly, representative,

Mr Magbul Abraham, representative, and

Mr Christopher Hams, representative, Centre for Multicultural Youth.

The CHAIR: Thank you for attending today's public hearing. It is really good to see you all here, and we look forward to your presentation. Before we do that I just want to mention that all evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, so you can say anything that you like. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by that privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible. So it is just a relaxed atmosphere. We just want to hear firsthand from you about how hard it is to actually be part of the jobseeking process, what you expect from the Government and how we can assist you. Whoever wants to start it off, you are welcome to.

Ms FOLLY: My name is Lamourette. I have been in Ballarat for almost 12 years now. Coming to a country that literally is separated from the whole entire world, one, is a very big challenge. It is really hard. Then growing up in a society which you at first do not understand and have to learn everything about is another challenge. Then you have to look for jobs. That is, like, the worst nightmare.

In my country you do not have the opportunity to look for a job. When you grow up and finish school, for a woman, basically you are more likely to just work on the farm your entire life and get married and have a baby. That is your life, so getting a job is not accessible. Then when you come to Australia you are confronted with having to look after your own financial issues. It is just like—wow!—a big slap in the face for a young woman from a refugee background.

So it is pretty hard being part of the jobseeking process in Ballarat, to be honest. We do not have many jobs for young people in our town and every job in our town basically requires some kind of degree. When they say degree, they do not just mean a degree; they ask you for experience: 'Hey, have you got three years experience in technology and engineering?', and you do not. You are a young person. You actually want to get in. I would start in that company by cleaning floors or whatever to get experience in that company, but the recruiters do not look for that. They do not look at you and see that you need the experience to start off with, and they do not think about young people being very fresh. They think of us as non-reliable people, so it is pretty hard for a young person to look for a job in Ballarat.

For me it was really hard to start off with. I looked for my first job at the age of 15 or 16. I literally applied to every retail place, every fast-food restaurant in Ballarat, before I got my first interview. How did I even end up getting that first interview? I did not do it all on my own. I had to have someone that is from the mainstream, someone white skinned, to take me into the restaurant. They looked at my résumé and then, 'Oh, you are this girl. Okay, do you want a job? Do you want to come in for an interview?'. Because I had that one person behind me then they were like, 'Okay, she is reliable', but because most of the time I was on my own, they looked at my résumé and said, 'Okay, we'll give you a call', and I never received anything.

So for a young person from a refugee background, whether you are coloured, whether your name is different or not—whether your name is Sarah—as soon as you present yourself your skin colour becomes your major outlook to start off with when you are looking for a job as a young person. So that is how hard it has been for me to start looking for a job until now. It is still very hard.

Mr ABRAHAM: I am Magbul. I am very young, 18. I came to Ballarat when I was around five or six. Looking for a job at 15 or 16 was kind of hard because of being black skinned. It has been really hard for me because media coverage around black young teens says we are in gangs, and we are just being judged based on that—and just having a different name. Sometimes when you are applying you have got to hand it in straightforward and they just say, 'Yeah, we'll take your résumé', but they do not really look at you or give you a fair go. Many, many times I have applied for retail jobs, like fast food, like Lamourette said, and many places like KFC and everything, and there are many other retail jobs. It has just been really hard, because getting rejections can affect you. You just keep getting rejected and rejected and it is like, 'Is there something wrong with me? What's happening? I don't know why I'm not getting a fair go'. I could have better qualifications than someone else but due to my skin it is going to be hard for me to get a job.

The CHAIR: And it affects the confidence too, doesn't it?

Mr ABRAHAM: Yes, it really does. It affects my confidence, and just taking it personally. From those kinds of experiences it just really hurt me, so I was going through all that and it stopped me applying for jobs most of the time. You see many retail jobs and things part time, like KFC. I feel like I would apply but I am just going to most likely get rejected, so having that kind of negative effect on me just delayed me going for jobs for a while.

Just after I turn 18—I am 17 now—and leaving school I have to look for a job if I am not going to go to uni. So then I joined CMY and they helped me with my résumé process and the qualifications and stuff. They helped me gain confidence again since I have lost it and it had that negative effect on me of just saying, ‘I’m not going to get a job because of my skin’. They just helped me throughout that and gave me back my confidence for it. They have given me opportunities, such as what I am doing right now at the university’s police program. I have been doing it through Jesuit Social Services. It is a program for police diversity people. It is just for diverse people to help you go through the stages of the police, so then seeing opportunities like that gives me the confidence to apply for jobs.

Pretty much basically having opportunities like that could have a positive effect on youth. Some examples, my friends, kept having negative effects and stuff and sometimes it could turn them onto crime. So just saying, ‘Oh, I’m a social reject, an outcast. I’m not going to get a job because of my skin’, and using that and having racial discrimination towards us. Then media coverage is not helping it, showing every bad side of us. Just having that around, that stigma and rejection for our race, just leads to different pathways like crime and not applying for anything, just trying to play the victim every time, pretty much. But having opportunities and maybe skill workshops or just more job openings for Pacific youth or an intended target, like for diverse people, could literally change a lot for those people.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. Hayley or Chris?

Ms McARTHUR: Yes, I could definitely say a few things. As a youth worker I am often the first person that supports a young person to apply for jobs. One thing that we have definitely noticed is there is just a lack of culturally competent practices in jobseeker agencies, I suppose. For employers in general as well there is a general lack of awareness of language and cultural differences. There is not really an incentive for employers to employ local young people or particularly young people from diverse backgrounds either. Young people are often pitted against each other going for these jobs and obviously if you are coming from a diverse background, if you have a name that is harder to pronounce on your résumé, if English is your fourth or fifth or sixth language, of course you are going to have a harder time getting a job than that white kid that was born in Ballarat. It makes it that much more difficult. So having incentives for employers to develop their own skills in employing young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is really important so they feel supported as well.

That is some of the feedback we have had from job providers as well—they just do not feel that they have the supports or resources necessary. They are scared to say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. So diversity programs such as what Magbul mentioned, the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program, they are really good. They are often a fantastic stepping stone for young people to get into different jobs, such as VicPol. But young people should have a fair chance at going for any job without having something specifically set up for people that are diverse. That is a really good start, but it would be great if those processes were in place to support young people going for any job regardless of their background as well.

Mr HAMS: Well, I guess I am quite lucky, having been born and grown up in Australia, so I have not had certain barriers associated with that. But I would say that, growing up in a small country town, contacts are really important for finding jobs. And often for people, especially those who are newly arrived to Australia who do not have those sorts of contacts, it is really hard to find inroads for jobs in regional areas, where just applying with résumés and things like that sometimes is not enough. I think making those contacts can be a really difficult thing for a lot of people and if you do not have that prior experience, you can get stuck in a loop of lethargy and lack of confidence and of not feeling like you deserve to apply for jobs. I was quite lucky where I got experience early and that sort of steamrolled into finding more jobs based off that. But if I did not get that experience early, I would have found it really difficult to get going and get a foot in the door. So, as Hayley and the others have said, I think more incentives for programs to get people in the door and get that initial experience and get those initial contacts are really important. I think that would be a really good way to get that

ball rolling on those sorts of things. But I think these guys are the ones to ask about those sorts of things—and the experts.

The CHAIR: Magbul, can I just ask: sport is an equaliser, sport is something that connects everybody, regardless of skin colour, so the Springbank football club—you play football?

Mr ABRAHAM: Yes.

The CHAIR: How do you feel in that club? Do you feel connected? Do you feel like you have got a social, cohesive grouping of people?

Mr ABRAHAM: Me at Springbank is like me being connected through the code and stuff. I feel very welcome. So just having that kind of roam around with the guys, joking around, feeling welcome, just gives me an equal fair go. Also playing seniors, getting a fair go because of my skills and stuff, just feels really well, feels really great, just to fit in.

The CHAIR: What position do you play on the field?

Mr ABRAHAM: I play midfield and half forward.

Mr BLACKWOOD: So are you going for Collingwood?

The CHAIR: The Cats are better.

Mr ABRAHAM: Yes, Geelong Cats are the best.

Ms ADDISON: Exactly. Good. Right answer. We have had the Highlands LLEN come and talk to us today and what they have said about Ballarat that is interesting, particularly for young people, is that we have a higher rate of young people having part-time jobs when they would like full-time work. Is that something that you see with your friends and in your experience, that when people are getting jobs they are not being able to secure full-time jobs or they may have to have multiple jobs? Could you talk to me about that?

Ms FOLLY: Yes, definitely that is one problem. When you finish university, when you graduate, obviously you want that full-time job, you want to have that 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, so you can have your weekends to spend with your family. But most of the time young people are not getting that. They are being offered either a casual spot or a part-time spot. When they are given a part-time spot, most of the time it is not the hours that they want, either. It is not reliable. They either have less hours than they need or they are dependent on a lot more. It does not make life any easier to have a part-time job or to have multiple part-time jobs. It just makes it harder for you to live your daily life and to have a normal life like a normal person I would say.

For example, at the moment, I do a part-time job. I work as a personal carer and I also work as a youth facilitator. I graduated in journalism—I have got a journalist's degree—but I could not find a job in that field. No matter how many jobs I applied for, literally I am pretty sure 100,000 of us are applying every year and coming from, once again, a coloured skin background, a refugee and migrant background, English is my fourth language, all these things really put me straight down the line, pretty much at the bottom of the list.

Working a part-time job, a casual job, it does not really give me any time to spend with my family. Most of the time I am going home and I am tired and my mum wants something and I am like, 'Mum, I'm tired. I can't really help you'. But she needs my help because I am pretty much the only girl at home. It makes life really hard, not just for myself but also for my mum and my little sister, who pretty much want my attention, but I cannot give it to them. That is the thing actually a lot among my friends in Ballarat and other young people that I work with, because since I have been working as a youth facilitator I notice how many young people come through our office. We are helping them to look for a job. We go through their résumé and what it is all about, but then again with all the norms that come with it, they are still ranked at the bottom of the list and if they are going to get a job, it is not going to be full time; it is always going to be either casual to start off with or part time. It is never going to be what they really wanted.

The CHAIR: So how do you think we as a State Government can help—in our capacity as state members, legislators that have various policies and programs in place that obviously in certain sections of our community are not working? How do you think we can help you find meaningful jobs and sustainable jobs?

Ms FOLLY: I think most of the time it is about those recruiters not understanding us. It is about those recruiters not knowing us, not knowing what we are capable of. Like, how do you say, they are pretty scared to give us a tryout because they do not know how they should talk to us and so on. It is not like we really have to be talked to in a sort of different manner, because we now grow up in this society where we learn your culture, where we learn to work your way and roll with the norms of the society and not be different. So we are learning to fit into the community.

So if the recruiters or each organisation can identify that we are not differentiating ourselves, that we are trying to fit into the community, then it will make it a bit easier—because most of time they look at us, being of colour, that as soon as they hear our name, as soon as it is different, ‘Oh, they’re from Africa’ or ‘They’re from France’, or something like that, and ‘They’re always going to be very different’. But no, that is not the case. Recruiters and state governments need to implement laws or some sort of implication that tells recruiters: you should give young people a fair go. Whether they have the experience or not, you should give them the job because they are going to get that experience from you. If you do not give it to them, they are never going to have that experience.

If I never get a chance to work at KFC, to work at L’espresso or whatever, I will never get the experience of working in retail, I will never get the experience of working with food and I will never get the experience of working with HR management in the same way as all those staff, because they decided to actually give me that choice, to give me that fair go and to give me that job. But most of the time they give me that job because my friend is there or because there is already a black kid there, not because of my knowledge, not because of my skills. It has always got to be someone in there before me, or someone has got to be behind that comes with me and says, ‘Hey, this person’s looking for this job’. It should never really be about someone who is behind you. Yes, we talk about contacts and connection, but for refugees and migrant young people, no matter how much contact they have, they are still in the back line.

The CHAIR: It is not about what you know; it is who you know.

Ms FOLLY: It is who you know; that is right. And if you know a manager working there and you talk to them regularly, then you are more likely to get something there. But when you do not know a manager, when you do not know an employee in that field, your paper is just basically in the bin.

Mr ROWSWELL: Hayley, is it true to say that in this particular area there is an issue with employment amongst young people generally but it is more specifically concentrated in linguistically diverse multicultural communities et cetera? Is that a fair—

Ms McARTHUR: Yes, absolutely. It is just those additional layers on top of it, I guess. Being a young person is a barrier. Being a young person from a diverse background is an additional barrier to that and being a young woman, an extra barrier on top of that. So it is those layers of barriers that build up and make it harder for someone else to find a job.

Mr ROWSWELL: So back to young people—not that you guys are not young, by the way—have you found a job?

Ms FOLLY: Me?

Mr ROWSWELL: Yes.

Ms FOLLY: Yes. Not as a journalist. I am currently working as a youth facilitator for CMY and also working part-time as a personal carer for Mercy Health.

Mr ROWSWELL: So tell me how you got that personal carer job at Mercy Health.

Ms FOLLY: Personal carer, Mercy Health: when Mercy first opened, they just opened new so they needed a bunch of workers. The reason why I first got my job there is that I am also on the BRMC—Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council—and I have got connections. I have done a lot of community work during the past. I do have my contacts. So I got through Mercy because of BRMC. Ann has contacted to Mercy, and it was like, ‘Okay, there’s a job there. Why don’t you apply?’. She put in a good word to those staff, and then I got into the group interview. Obviously I do not have an aged-care qualification either, but I got that job because of my contacts.

Mr ROWSWELL: And is that an example that you have shared with other people in a similar circumstance to you, to encourage them to become perhaps more active in their community, which may then start breaking down barriers and give them an opportunity?

Ms FOLLY: Definitely, yes. Being active in the community actually gives you a clearer view of how the city is moving and how employers are moving in the society. Because I was a youth councillor, that told me how the council worked, that told me how to talk to the mayor, how to talk to the councillors and how to work with other young people in my community. Obviously when I am looking for a job in social development, I will know how to approach that because being a youth councillor teaches you that.

When I became a youth adviser with the Centre for Multicultural Youth, I learned how to work with refugees and migrants, I learned how to plan activities in my community, how to talk to other recruiters, how to talk with Members of Parliament and so on. It depends on the type of voluntary work you are doing and the type of field that you are in, but it gives you different knowledge and different skills on how to move into the employment forum.

I have shared that with a lot of young people, but then again, a lot of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have got siblings that they have to stay home and look after. Most of the time they do not really have time. A lot of the time I took my little sister to all of my meetings. Everyone learned off her as my back-talker, because she would come and when we were discussing things she would actually talk too—because she grew up in a big family so she learned very fast. Instead of me staying home and babysitting her, I’m like to Mum, ‘No, we’re getting on the bus. I’ve got a meeting, so I’ll take her with me’, when my mum had to go to a doctor’s appointment or whatever. Most young people in that kind of situation do not want to take their siblings, because their siblings are probably going to be a burden to them. When they are outside, they are going to cry, they will want food and all that stuff—they will have to be looked after. They are better off just to stay home with their siblings. So, yes, I share my story and tell young people, ‘Hey, it’s very good to volunteer, it’s very good to do this and that’, but then again, they turn around and say, ‘I don’t really have much time’.

Ms ADDISON: What about you, Magbul? Are you employed at the moment?

Mr ABRAHAM: Yes, I am casual at the Forge. I got that job through contacts—basically my previous job at the Cheesecake Shop, through a friend and contact.

The CHAIR: Sorry, I missed that.

Ms ADDISON: He works at the Forge pizza shop.

The CHAIR: Oh, Forge.

Ms ADDISON: Where we were going to go for dinner last night, and where we are going for dinner next time. He also worked at the Cheesecake Shop.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Mr ABRAHAM: I got that job through basically contacts like Barry from CMY and then a friend, Ranika. Pretty much I got most of my job opportunities through contacts.

Ms ADDISON: Magbul, I know you finished Year 12 last year. We have been asking a lot of people about careers counsellors at school and stuff like that. As someone who has recently been at school, even though it was a year ago, what work experience opportunities did you have through school and what career guidance or

support did you get at school? So we are broadening it out from just CMY, but if you could help us with that as a recent school leaver that would be great too.

Mr ABRAHAM: My school career counsellor—he did not offer many options to be honest. He just said, ‘Here, there’s this job you should try’. He did not ask for my interests. We did discuss things. Like, he said ‘Would you like to do this? What would you like to do?’ sometimes, and I would give him my options. But instead of going towards my options, he just gives me other jobs due to education level. He was like, ‘If you have low scores, you would go and do coffee training or something’. Really, they were retail jobs, pretty much. So a career counsellor was not much help for me.

Ms ADDISON: What about work experience? Did you do any work experience through school or while you were at school?

Mr ABRAHAM: In Year 10 we had to do work experience, but it was our choice.

Ms ADDISON: And where did you go?

Mr ABRAHAM: I went to a primary school.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask both of you—I know that you are looking to be a journalist. I am not sure if it is print, radio or TV, or what field of journalism you would like to do. I hope that you are successful. Can you both tell me what you aspire to be and where you want to be in the next four or five years?

Ms FOLLY: I have got such an open mind. Since I was a kid I have always wanted to do so many things. My father was a soldier throughout his life, so he did many things as a soldier. He was a professor at university, he was a teacher, so he went through many different types of employment systems. That kind of makes me want to do so many different things. Everywhere I study. I love my writing. I love my writing and I love talking, and I want to be a journalist. I want to tell people stories, because that is what really is part of me. I want to share people’s stories with the world. But then again I want to be a dentist.

The CHAIR: There is more money in that, let me tell you!

Ms FOLLY: I want to help kids from disadvantaged countries, look after their teeth and all that because we do not have those opportunities back home either. And I want to work in HR. My biggest goal is to end up working in the United Nations on women’s issues—human rights and women’s equality. So right now I actually do not have a narrow mind.

The CHAIR: You want to run for Parliament one day maybe?

Ms FOLLY: I hope so, yes. But then again because I am from a background where I have gone through so much and come to a country where there is actually opportunity—where you see all these opportunities—you just want to have a hand in each of them. You do not want to be stuck in one place, because when you are stuck in one place you feel you are going back to the past. You feel like you have been just chained to one place, where you have been imprisoned. You feel like you are back in that kind of space again. That is why most young people from my background will keep moving from job to job—because they want to try out so many things before in the future they settle.

The CHAIR: Magbul, same question.

Mr ABRAHAM: I would love, I aspire, to be pretty much anything, to be honest. I have to say I have an open mind as well. I wanted to be a doctor, I wanted to be in the police growing up. I wanted to be a part of Parliament too, and the council. Just have a big role. But right now I aspire to slowly gain more contacts to join the United Nations, so in a couple of years I will hopefully see myself in the United Nations for human rights as well and just travel the world helping people.

Mr BLACKWOOD: That is after you play for Collingwood for 300 games.

Mr ABRAHAM: I will never play for Collingwood.

Ms FOLLY: Cats for life.

Mr ABRAHAM: I despise Collingwood. After many years of defeat you have to.

The CHAIR: The economy is growing in this state and there are job opportunities in various fields. Construction is a huge area of industry. We are building things. We are building rail lines, we are building roads, we are building infrastructure. Also there is a lot of work in the health field. There is a lot of work in the Ballarat health hub.

Ms ADDISON: GovHub Ballarat.

The CHAIR: So what we are trying to do is make the connection between whether there are jobs available in Ballarat or are the jobs not suitable for the young people in Ballarat, and what the aspirations of the young people are to connect them to the right job. That is the real challenge. But as far as jobs are concerned, there are probably jobs out there, but is it the job that you want to do? That is the question. That is what we are trying to find. With the young cohort it is about placement of young people into the jobs of their dreams. That is not going to happen all the time, and if you are lucky enough to find a job immediately that you love to do, that is great, but in the meantime there is a vacuum that is being created in relation to the jobs that we need at the moment. I cannot begin to tell you the amount of infrastructure that is going to be built in this state. So that is why we ask about career guidance, teachers and how they are guiding students in terms of the jobs of the future and whether that suits the needs of the young people in Ballarat. That is why we are asking some of these questions.

Ms ADDISON: We are also going to need a lot of social media for these great projects as well.

The CHAIR: Yes, absolutely.

Ms ADDISON: There are going to be a whole lot of communications and other opportunities as well, which is very important.

The CHAIR: Yes, there are lots of opportunities. It is finding the niche market for individual young people that live in Ballarat that is the challenge, really. The skill sets that you both have obviously would be needed in some field, but just finding that field is the important part. I wish you all the best for the future.

Ms THEOPHANOUS: Sorry, I came in late so I did not catch the start of the conversation, but I guess my question is: amongst your peers, you and your peers, do you feel like you need to move away from Ballarat in order to get the job that you want?

Ms FOLLY: Yes, most of the time you do feel like you need to move out from Ballarat and either go to Melbourne or got to a totally different city to get the job that you want because you feel like there are just more options out there than in Ballarat. But instead Ballarat is such a great place. It is a great place for young people. It is a great place for family. And if you get a job in Ballarat, a job that you want, a full-time job to start off with, whether it is the job that you want or not, it is a full-time job and something for you to pay your bills. You just rely on that, then you do not have to rely on a second job. It is great for young people to stay in Ballarat. If you learn in Ballarat, if you study in Ballarat, it is just good to stay in Ballarat and donate back to the community because you have obviously gotten a lot from the teachers or the school that you went you.

But when I finished high school, when I finished Year 12 in 2015, I moved to Melbourne because I wanted to study journalism and they did not have it in Ballarat. So I went to Melbourne to study my journalism. I wanted to stay in Ballarat to do my journalism, but I could not because it just was not offered here, so I had to go to Melbourne and I had to travel back to Ballarat four days a week to go to work. That put a lot of strain on my study, on the time that I could have available to donate to my education, because I was busy trying to work so that I could pay the rent, so that I could buy my mum's medications and all that stuff when I actually did not even wish to leave home. I did not want to leave home, that is why I am still coming back four days a week to work in the same town that I studied at. It would have been great to stay in Ballarat. A lot of my friends from high school moved—they moved to Geelong, Bendigo and Melbourne to study—because the university in Ballarat just was not offering what they needed, what they wanted, and the jobs were just not available here for them either.

Mr ABRAHAM: For me, being 18, looking for a job, you are mostly looking for retail, and then going on the job website you do not see much retail offers and options. You just think to your head straightaway, you might as well widen your options. Maybe look into trade, like in Ballan, Bacchus Marshall, Melton. Sometimes your career guidance officer when I was in school would offer you tradie jobs from basically not in Ballarat. Pretty much it was Ballan, you could do construction work there, or Ballan Maccas. There are not much job options in retail, or Target never pops up when you go job searching.

Ms THEOPHANOUS: This might have been asked already, but amongst you and your peers is there much awareness around the free TAFE courses that the Government is offering?

Ms FOLLY: I do not think so.

Mr ABRAHAM: I do not have any.

Ms FOLLY: The young people that came through CMY, we told them, 'Hey, there's free TAFE available. If you finish uni, whether it's VET or VCAL or not, there's free TAFE available if that's an option you want to look into'. We promote that as much as we can, and as much as if you want to go to uni, that is still the best pathway to take, but at the same time it is just not well advertised to young people out there either. The only time you would learn about the free TAFE courses at all is if you would go to a workshop. If you go to an employment workshop or you go to some kind of workshop that is being held, they would be like, 'Hey, this is available at this university', which is the free TAFE that is being given in Ballarat.

The CHAIR: Excellent, thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.