

Affirmative Employment Unit

The Ministry of Employment and Training has made a grant of \$116 735 to the Brotherhood for the establishment of an Affirmative Employment Unit.

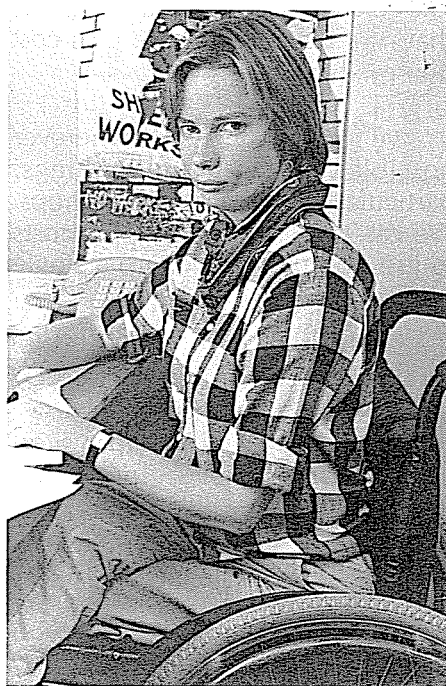
This pilot project is designed to help the Brotherhood and other community sector employers open up job access to disadvantaged people. The community service sector of the economy is widely tipped as the area where most job growth will occur, and the challenge is to ensure special measures are taken to give the unemployed access to some of those jobs. It can be too easy for community organisations to see their staff needs only in terms of professional people and others with tertiary qualifications.

The Unit was launched on 21 February by the then Minister for Employment and Training, Mr Jim Simmonds. Its first task is to implement change within the Brotherhood itself, and the experience here is expected to provide a resource for other employers. The Unit's approach will be to ask, for instance, what is stopping young people from getting jobs in the community service sector — and then to see where the barriers could be broken down. Projects for which organisations receive grants from governments frequently carried fairly rigid conditions on the qualifications of staff to be involved. A more flexible approach, including on the job training, might open the work up to others.

Fiona Smith is the co-ordinator of the Unit. She became involved in equal opportunity issues during the Year of the Disabled. She realised that although she worked as a solicitor, thousands of others with disabilities like herself had limited job prospects due to barriers ranging from inadequate training and education to discriminatory practices by employers.

Fiona says, "It's an exciting project which will extend the principles of the Federal Government Affirmative Action strategy for women in large commercial companies to the community services sector, and widen it to include all types of disadvantaged people.

"It's a challenge which I hope employers will take up."



Fiona Smith

How One Woman Fought Her Way Back

(From the "Age" Jobs Supplement 22/2/85).

This is the story of one woman's return to employment. Thousands like her have helped reshape Australia's workforce.

But it has a couple of unusual features. One is that it is the story of one of Australia's best known women, Hazel Hawke. The other is that it must have had quite an impact on the life and views of the man who is now Prime Minister.

"Like many women, I had been working full time at home caring for my family. Like many women whose lives have been centred around the domestic sphere, I wanted a vehicle for meeting people other than through my husband, my children and my immediate interests.

"I wanted to contribute in the wider sphere of the workforce. I also needed to define myself and my self-esteem beyond being somebody's wife or mother.

"I had become low in confidence in competitive work situations because I had not had a paid job since my first baby.

"I began working in a voluntary capacity in the Action and Resource Centre, a project of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. After working for

three years part time, I progressed to a full-time salaried job as personal assistant and secretary to an associate director of the Brotherhood.

"This opened new vistas, areas of experience, networks of people and friendships. After two years in that job I studied for two years full time for a welfare studies diploma. This seemed a natural progression and was another new experience.

"These personal details illustrate how my life changed, my vistas broadened, in much the same way as has happened for many other women who had in the past led a more family-oriented life. We are looking for new challenges and new ways to direct our energies and talents."

Mrs Hawke told this story as part of her speech at a conference entitled, "From Margin to Mainstream" about women in the workforce.

She also urged better child care and other support services for employed women, a greater share by men in parental and domestic responsibilities, and more recognition by employers of the realities of women's lives.

She said the vast majority of women wanting paid jobs "would rather not be at home full time. They are least satisfied with their current arrangement, preferring the dual role of mother and worker."

And just in case anyone still thinks this is a relatively recent phenomenon, she included a quote from 'The Age' in 1911:

"In a word, the Australian woman has displayed a strong preference for breadwinning and a marked disinclination to regard wifedom and motherhood as a primary vocation, and she has emphasised her preference by insidiously and successfully assailing almost every stronghold of masculine employment."

(Note: These views are not necessarily the views of the Brotherhood but are included for their interest to readers. Ed.)

Rubbishing Bins

The media in Melbourne recently gave publicity to the problem the Brotherhood has with people