

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

Shepparton—Wednesday, 20 November 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

WITNESS

Ms Leanne Hulm, Program Manager, GROW Greater Shepparton.

The CHAIR: Thank you for attending today, Leanne. 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 go outside and repeat the same thing, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this 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. Leanne, I know the previous work that you have done, being the former minister for tourism, and I appreciated your valued input into that area. Now you have got a different role. Do you want to give us a presentation, if you like, or do you want us to ask you questions? How would you like to proceed?

Ms HULM: I know we are tight on time, so if everyone is aware of GROW and has a good grasp of what GROW does, then I am happy just to move straight into it, unless somebody would like me to just give a quick overview of the GROW program.

Ms ADDISON: Even if you could tell us when GROW came to the Goulburn Valley and just—

Ms HULM: So I have been in this role for six months. Sam Birrell chairs the Committee for Greater Shepparton, and that is the backbone organisation. So the consultant which works with all of the GROWs, ArcBlue Consulting, had started some initial contact and conversations with industry, but really I have been in the role in a full-time capacity for the last six months—so probably more so getting out to industry in the last six months.

The CHAIR: I am a big fan of GROW. It started off in Geelong, and obviously as the State Government we see the value of GROW and now we have extended that funding to regions such as Shepparton and beyond. In terms of collaboration, obviously we have had employer groups give us submissions, and they were more wanting to have people that are job-ready in terms of before they come to seek employment. So can you tell us: what are the challenges, for example, for us as a State Government and how can GROW help with that?

Ms HULM: I think through the learnings, and what I mainly did at the start when I first started in the role was go out to industry and try to understand the gaps and where their frustrations were. Part of that frustration and most of the feedback was that they could take multiple people at any time of the day but they could not find people who were, as we say, job-ready, whether that was from the migrant backgrounds or just that their English was not quite up to where they needed. One business defined it as 'Xbox-fit, but not work-fit'.

Mr ROWSWELL: That is an actual thing.

Ms HULM: That is.

The CHAIR: That resembles my son.

Ms HULM: Most people, when I say that, actually get that pretty quickly. So they need people being able to get back into the workforce and be really job-ready. So if we think about the cohorts that I am working with, which is youth unemployment, disengaged, long-term unemployed, Indigenous, migrants, refugees, they need a lot of support and help to be pre-trained and to get a really good grasp before they go into business. Industry is absolutely desperate. There are jobs there constantly.

The disconnect for me and what I have uncovered is that the jobactive component is not necessarily delivering what they need, and by way of that I am paraphrasing different industries by saying that they will deliver them people who will arrive for an interview not even understanding their industry and not necessarily actually wanting a full-time job. They are there to tick a box to potentially keep their Centrelink payments going. So they do not see or want to interact any more with the jobactives, because they are delivering people who, one, are not job ready; two, are not literally looking for a job. So they are more inclined to go through a friend of a friend's son who wants a job. They prefer to roll the dice and employ that person because they see it as there is a willingness to actually turn up five days a week, and they genuinely want a job and they have genuinely researched and understood the industry that they are going into, whether it is manufacturing, civil, or whatever it might be.

We have got a massive shortage here in five main categories. There is logistics—Shepparton, as you may know, is a transport hub. If I talk to the transport logistics people, they will say to me, ‘We’ve got an ageing fleet and we’re not talking about our trucks’. Yet there is a disconnect between potentially the education and school structures and TAFE that this is not being offered as a potential career opportunity. Logistics is not something that comes up, and this is a massive industry here and one that is missing huge opportunities. We have got horticulture, so we have got Cannatrek and AgBioEn, who are coming to this region. They are going to be collectively looking for over 1,500 people to work. That is massive, but we do not seem to have enough people coming through in that industry either. Allied health is just a major issue, and a number of people have already touched on that today. But what I am finding with the disconnect between that cohort that we talked about just before is if you talk to them, you say, ‘Well, they need hotel servicing, they need customer service, they need ground staff’, and you say to them, ‘Have you ever tried to get a job at GV Health?’, ‘Oh, I couldn’t possibly get a job there’. So there is a disconnect, and yet GV Health would—

Ms ADDISON: Screaming out for people.

Ms HULM: Screaming out for people. So there is that disconnect. If you look at, currently, the advertising of those organisations, they focus on people who look very well-educated. They do not focus on people that potentially someone from that cohort could see and go, ‘Well, if they could get a job there, maybe I should have a go’. So we need to have a look at the way in which we promote these industries to those cohorts as well. Manufacturing and civil are absolutely screaming, and you guys would know better than me how much infrastructure is about to come our way. I will go and tap businesses on the shoulder that have a potential to put in for a tender, a \$5 million or \$6 million build—quite capable. But they say, ‘Leanne, if I don’t get the labour force, I can’t possibly even apply for that tender’. So from my role to secure procurement, to gain social procurement, I have got a chicken and an egg, yet I have got a 13.5% youth unemployment rate. So there is a big disconnect there.

Ms ADDISON: Yes. You have inspired me to jump on the GOTAFE website to have a look at the free TAFE courses in this region. I am so pleased to see that there are Certificate IIs in agriculture, in engineering studies. There is a Cert III in Agriculture, in allied health, in so many—horticulture, as we were just talking about. As a government do we need to be doing more to try and match up or engage our young people with free TAFE? We have brought free TAFE to the table to say, ‘We will remove the financial barrier’. We are saying to employers, ‘We’re only going to offer free TAFE in these jobs. We don’t need people doing basket weaving when there is no community or industry demand for basket weaving. We’ve tailored this for your community’. I am really pleased that GOTAFE is reflecting everything that you are talking about, the gaps. So what more can we do? Can we talk to Minister Tierney about what we can do for Shepparton to try and get more of these young people, who will have great careers and opportunities if we can get them the qualifications and get them job ready?

Ms HULM: The free courses are fantastic, and I think if we did more analysis around it, potentially they are not being run maybe because they are not being filled—and minimum classes are around 12 people; I think it is around about that—because I believe that the cohort again that I am talking about do not see TAFE as a pathway. Again, it is a self-esteem thing of, ‘I couldn’t possibly do a course like that’, even though it is free. So we have done a great job of advertising free, free, free, free courses, but we are not actually getting the people to come in. That is, again, another disconnect between the cohorts. I am actually scoping out some meetings with TAFE at the moment. They are in a bit of a rebuild phase—new executives and a reasonably new CEO—and they are doing an amazing job of rebuilding. We are trying to look at ways in which they can be the RTOs, so running the courses, but taking them outside of the TAFE building, if you like—not system but building. So whether we are working with African House, which is your baseline English classes, and doing it at African House so the mums can still see their children in the day care centre, it is just thinking a little bit outside the square, because those cohorts do not see that they have got a pathway through TAFE.

Ms CONNOLLY: We have talked a lot about culturally safe spaces and how they are really important for people of Aboriginal background and heritage. Is this a little bit similar to what you are saying about having—however you want to call it—a safe space for the people that are keen to get the skill, but having it in a place that, yes, is a safe space for them? Going into the classroom is just too much for where they are at, but if TAFE comes to them in their safe space, we can get them onto that pathway and into that employment.

Ms HULM: Correct, and that is what I am scoping out next week with the executive team. It is not all courses, but certainly that particular high-level cohort we know we could place into full-time work in a very short period of time and get them directly off welfare. But that perception of sitting in a classroom having to learn and take that in and potentially do testing and all of those things is just far too overwhelming. But taking it into the space that they are comfortable in, whether that is the training room where their jobactive is or whatever it might be, seems to have broken down those barriers of, 'I get it now; I'd be happy to sign up for that', and it is free and so on. That is what I am working on with TAFE at the moment, because I feel that is the biggest barrier for this disadvantaged cohort to come directly job-ready and into industry.

Ms CONNOLLY: It is interesting that you talk about that, because we have had discussions about becoming TAFE-ready, and what you are talking about just seems to take that TAFE-ready out of it and just go straight to the source and doing the course there.

Ms HULM: Yes. If we look at this region, I have got 20 businesses that would take multiple people today in civil, yet TAFE do not offer a Cert III in civil—cannot get a trainer. So there are some other barriers that we are facing that are just absolutely ludicrous. When I have gone to industry and said, 'If we could provide you with a person who starts a Cert III, a 13-week course, fast-tracked for six weeks, all on site, hands-on, doing everything'—and there are number of RTOs that do that—'and we delivered them, would you take them on?'. I had one industry person say, 'Well, I'll take all 24'. You can share it around a little bit. That is the level that I am talking about to industry around the need for people. But it is about getting them job-ready with the exposure. It comes back to that work experience, and we talked about that. Industry is willing to take them to give them that exposure of, 'This is what a civil job looks like; is this really what you want to do?', and then be able to put them through the training and deliver them back to that industry into full-time work.

Ms CONNOLLY: Can I ask, what do you see as the role of the schools? How do you access these young people? If the businesses are saying, 'Yes, we want to take them and give them traineeships, work experience or whatever they need to get them to go and do the course and come and work for us', where is the disconnect then? Why is business not talking to them at school and saying, 'Go and do this, and you will have a job'?

Ms HULM: Lighthouse—and Sam Birrell brought up Lighthouse before—have an industry links component there where they go and take children out, and so does the Goulburn Murray LLEN. Similarly, they take kids out to particular organisations and businesses, but there does not seem to be any follow-up after that. So they will take them out to Kreskas Brothers or they will take them down to the SAM museum build site with Kane and say, 'So this is what construction looks like and this is the depth and breadth you can do', but there does not seem to be any follow-up from those tours. And the information I am getting from industry is that they are getting fatigued because there are so many other industries that are doing the same thing. I think part of it for me is that coming into this role I was unaware of the amount of services, but I have now collated around 25 services all doing the same thing in Shepparton, in one way or another. So if you are person with a disability or have been long-term unemployed, how do you navigate that pathway?

The other thing that I am finding is the amount of courses and the people popping up. And they are amazing, they are all doing great things, but I am wondering: where are the actual outcomes? And if they are not getting straight back into industry, then people are doing all of these courses but they are actually not getting any outcomes in full-time work.

Ms ADDISON: It is interesting you say that. Yesterday we had a submission from the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, and they said that rather than have 10 programs they would rather one program with greater flexibility.

Ms HULM: Correct.

Ms ADDISON: So rather than having 10 different service providers, have one big program. Do you think, provided it did have flexibility to cater for the needs of different pockets within the community, that could be something that would be beneficial to Greater Shepparton?

Ms HULM: Absolutely. Even I am confused. I am trying to track all of these. I had two more meetings this week with two more providers I had never even heard of, and yet when I looked through what they are offering,

it is fantastic—and I had no idea that they were even here. Rather than working collaboratively, they are working in silos. No-one is talking. There is jobseeking and jobactive. They are working in silos and they are working competitively, but no-one is actually working together to get the outcome where they are in full-time work. I have got industry screaming at me. I am looking at all of these figures and everything that is happening, but there are still no outcomes from that training straight into industry. So that for me is a bit of a disconnect. I think if we could try and collate everyone to make those pathways for those people who genuinely want a job—and there are a lot of them—a very simple process and ‘Here is an outcome’. That is where through GROW I have been able to, with my connections straight into industry, hand-place people myself if I have had to, because they are going, ‘I desperately need someone’. I spoke to someone two days before and was able to make a phone call and say, ‘There you go. You two talk and I’m out’, and it has all worked out really well.

Mr ROWSWELL: It sounds like we need to clone you and better resource what you do in the community. I am interested in just exploring, very briefly in the time we have left, the disconnect piece that you were speaking about earlier—the disconnect between a young person recognising what their opportunity is or otherwise the disconnect between employers and potential candidates, specifically around the job-ready piece. Where, in your view, is intervention needed—at what stage of a jobseeker’s development? And what does that intervention look like? Is it a better focus on career advice at an earlier stage? Is it better coordination of services? Is it a bit of both of those and other things?

Ms HULM: I think I would come back to the work experience and work exposure to that Year 9, 10, even 11 and 12. I know when I went through school you did two weeks during your school term, and you picked—and I know the first one I picked I absolutely thought I wanted to be that and I could not wait for the Friday to come along because I knew that was exactly what I did not want. In my second week I did another one and I went, ‘That’s certainly another one I can tick off my bucket list of “I don’t want to be that as a career”’. What that enabled me to do was really start to develop my pathway of what I wanted to do, because I knew then what I did not want to do. What I would love to see reintroduced—and maybe it will be through the new Shepparton college—is a designated work experience. And again, industry and business are prepared to put their hand up and say, ‘If they genuinely want to know about civil or horticulture and they’re really passionate about that, then we will take them and we will mentor them and we will show them what a day in the life of a horticulturalist could be’. I think that is really important that we bring back that work experience and work exposure.

So we could start with a program where we have got people on the ground wanting to learn but then giving them that hands on. So that is the other part of what I am talking about with TAFE—doing those courses but having 70% of it being hands on and 30% of that then back in the classroom and doing the education side of it. It gets that exposure. Then through those courses I am able to tap directly into business saying, ‘I’ve got 12 people going through allied health. How many will you take, GV Health? How many will you take, NDIS?’, and out of that course we can actually give them a meaningful outcome.

Ms CONNOLLY: I like that there is someone like you doing that. It is just the practical placement.

Ms HULM: It is.

Ms CONNOLLY: Because we have listened to groups saying, ‘We do all these courses, and then we can’t get a job’.

Ms HULM: As an example, I was in a client meeting and we got talking. Her son was finishing school, and he had been with a jobactive for four months. They kept ringing and saying, ‘We haven’t heard from you’, and the response was, ‘Well, if you can get your own job, that’s probably a good way to go about it’. She sent me through his résumé. He has dyslexia, so he was not putting himself forward, and I got him a job as a cadet on a worksite within two days. I should not be doing that. That should not be my role, but my industry link allowed me to join the dots, which is what GROW does, and that is my role, to be the conduit. But again, the jobactive had let this kid sit there for four months doing nothing.

Mr ROWSWELL: Leanne, thanks very much for your time today and for presenting to the Committee.

Ms HULM: Thank you.

Ms ADDISON: It has been really interesting. Thank you very much.

Ms HULM: Thanks very much for your time.

Witness withdrew.