

{ UNEMPLOYMENT BLUES }

Reviving a sense of self-worth

Max Employment seeks co-operation in its campaign to find jobs for 10,000

DENISE CULLEN

EMPLOYMENT consultant Denise Skelton is used to sitting across the table from people who've lost their sense of hope.

"I have clients in their mid-20s who can't read or write, they've never worked, and often don't believe they can get work, or know where to start looking for it," explains Skelton, who works for MAX Employment at Gosford, on the NSW central coast.

MAX Employment is one of Australia's leading jobs service providers; it operates by winning government contracts to assist the unemployed back into work.

"Sometimes people's financial circumstances have changed — they've lost their job, their partner, their home," Skelton explains.

"Most of my clients also suffer from some form of anxiety or depression in the past: they've been rejected, hurt physically or emotionally, and have a sense of shame and embarrassment ... when they walk through the door."

One such client was Joanne*, whom Centrelink referred to MAX Employment in 2009.

"It's a hard thing to understand when someone is sitting in front of you and they have no faith in themselves," Skelton says. "She was saying things like, 'No one will ever employ me, I will never amount to anything, it's all my fault' ... there was all that internalisation."

Skelton helped her client estab-

lish a plan to study and upskill, and thus improve her employment prospects. "She was very creative and had talked about doing a certificate III in beauty services, which she eventually completed with a distinction."

Skelton also provided Joanne with crucial emotional support during the transition. "My role is to ... help them believe in themselves again," she says.

"I said to her, 'Leave the frightened person at home: I want to see the brave woman, I can already see her dancing in your eyes'."

After completing her course, which took 18 months, Joanne was invited by two leading department stores to attend interviews and accepted an offer of permanent part-time work from one of them.

"There's not a lot of money [in this industry], but it really does nourish your soul," says Skelton.

According to MAXNetWork managing director Michael Hobday, being unemployed can have devastating social and economic effects on people.

"We see many inspiring stories of people who have done it tough, but once they get sustainable employment, their whole world changes for the better," he says.

"Sometimes, all it takes is for someone to give them a go."

He points out that anyone may need employment assistance at some point, from people suffering mental health issues through to mothers returning to the work-

force after many years away. "While people have all sorts of barriers, sometimes it's just a confidence thing that can turn around — when people get a job, it's breaking that cycle," he says.

For this reason, MAX Employment recently launched The Great Australian Christmas Jobs Drive, which seeks to inspire Australian employers to provide opportunities for jobseekers leading into the festive season.

"This campaign is not just about employers providing vacancies," Hobday says. "Christmas is a time when not having a job can impact hard on Australians and their families, so it's also designed to inspire jobseekers, employers and the community to work together to create sustainable employment outcomes going into 2012. For many Australians, there would be no better gift than the gift of a job this Christmas."

For every jobseeker who finds sustainable employment, MAX Employment will make a contribution to the Smith Family Christmas appeal.

The firm provides a free recruitment service and specialises in placing people in jobs in industries such as retail, warehousing and hospitality.

A month into its campaign, MAX Employment has already made 2400 job placements, but its target is 10,000, so there are still plenty of opportunities for companies to participate.

Hobday says the focus is on people with disabilities, youth, people from indigenous backgrounds, or those who've been unemployed for longer than 12 months. Barriers to employment may include a lack of training and education, difficulties with transport, a history of drug abuse or recent incarceration.



Max Employment is contracted by the government to find jobs for the long-term unemployed

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DENISE SKELTON
CONSULTANT WITH MAX
EMPLOYMENT

MAX Employment seeks to fill the gaps — for example, providing jobseekers with work boots if they are required for a particular role, or handing them fuel cards if money for transport is an issue.

"We also let employers know that we'll pay part of [the jobseeker's] salary for part of the time if you just give them a go."

Hobday says not all placements work out due to a variety of factors, but even if things don't progress with one employer, people can take their new skills to another job.

"After all, it's much easier to get another job if you've already got a job or experience," he says.

To participate in this campaign, call MAX Employment on 1800 625 350 or pledge a vacancy via www.maxemployment.com.au/jobsdrive.

* Not her real name.