

### Submitted by Shoalhaven Anti Poverty Committee

The Shoalhaven Anti-Poverty Committee has (SAPC) been concerned about the effect of insecure work on individuals and families in our area for some time. In March 2007 the Shoalhaven had the highest unemployment rate in Australia. In response SAPC developed a report and action plan to address some of the issues around our concern for the number of individuals and families living in poverty in the area. The 2008 report '*Perspectives on Poverty in the Shoalhaven: issues, consequences and recommendations*' noted that the Shoalhaven had been severely impacted by the neoconservative economic agenda as businesses rationalized operations during the late 1980's and through to the present day.

Over the last 25 years the Shoalhaven has seen significant downsizing of the dairy industry and the downsizing or closure of a number of the larger manufacturers. Both dairying and manufacturing provided stable employment opportunities for unskilled or semiskilled workers. It is of interest to note that some welfare agencies in the Shoalhaven continue to report in 2011 that one of the hardest groups of people to place into work are unemployed males in their late 30's to mid to early 50's who are early school leavers and have either never worked or only ever had casual work or short term work.

Both dairying and manufacturing continue to be important to the region but as of the 2006 census data the five major industry employers in the Shoalhaven were school education; defence; hospitals; cafes, restaurants and take away food services; supermarket and grocery stores; and hospitals (Census 2006 Local Government Area – Shoalhaven). The first two employ predominately professional staff and the last three offer predominately part time or casual shift work. The 2006 Census reports that 33.9% of jobs in the Shoalhaven were part time at the time of the census compared to 27.9% across Australia. It will be interesting to see how these figures may have changed in the 2012 Census but it is unlikely they will have improved given the trend towards casualisation of the workforce.

SAPC therefore felt it was important that we respond to the Insecure Work Inquiry recognising that we have limited resources. Therefore our submission will be short but we hope valuable to the Inquiry. We understand that the Inquiry is particularly interested in getting personal stories and where possible we have tried to encourage individuals to take the opportunity to put in a submission. It has been noted that some people reported a reluctance to do so because they thought it might impact on their job in some way. We have been able to collect the stories of four people. In respect of their wishes we have not used their real names.

1. **Retail Worker:** Felicity was in her mid 40's when diagnosed with breast cancer. Both she and her husband have only held casual work since the late 1980's. They have two teenage children and live in rented accommodation. Felicity has worked for the same small grocery store for 6 years and although she receives regular work she says that the family struggle to live on their combined income because her husband's work is less reliable. Felicity reports feeling extremely anxious because she doesn't know how they will afford to continue to pay the rent while she is in recovery, how they can afford to meet the cost of their children's growing needs and whether she will still have a job when she is ready to return to work. In addition Felicity said that she knew they would never own their own home and would find it harder to get and keep jobs as they got older.
2. **Labourer:** James is in his early 50's and other than during his teens he has never had a full time job. Until recently he was unemployed for more than 20

years with intermittent casual or cash in hand work. He recently secured a 6 month stint of work on a casual basis through a government funded project. Although he reports feeling better about himself and much more motivated he also expressed concerns that the position was only short term, there was no exit plan or strategy for moving him into a more stable work position and he continued to rely on receiving an unemployment benefit.

3. **Community Sector Worker:** Rose has worked for the same organisation in the community sector for the last 5 years as both a casual and as a part time worker on a short term contract. Rose is a single mother with a teenage daughter studying at University. Her daughter's education has been and continues to be paid for by Rose's ex husband and Rose lives rent free in a property owned by a family member. Without this family support and additional cash in hand work Sarah says she would not be able to provide for herself and her daughter. In the last two years the employer has adopted a policy of implementing short term contracts of 6 to 12 months for casual employees. Rose has no security of tenure and although, during her contracted period her hours of work are relatively stable she does not receive any of the additional benefits of being part time such as sick or annual leave. Rose reports that as the end of her contract comes near she feels anxious and angry, that she finds it difficult to focus on her work and achieving the expected outcomes and that at times she feels bitter about her work conditions and circumstances. Rose is currently doing further study in the hope she can get more permanent work in the field with a relevant qualification.
4. **Disability Support Worker:** Michael is in his mid 40's and is employed as a disability support worker by a respite service. The employer has a number of casual employees who provide respite services to families of people with a disability. Shifts range from 2 to 8 hours or in some instances over nighters. Michael has been employed by the service for almost 5 years and during that period has had times where he has been offered a significant number of shifts through to more recent times where he is only getting 3 to 4 hours per week. In addition the service has recently restricted the amount of travel kilometres and hours that an employee can claim when working with clients. Michael said he has had a number of clashes with his employer over the years regarding what he considers to be their failure to follow the disability service standards. In addition he recently took Workers Compensation Leave. On his return he was not returned to his regular shifts but was given a much reduced work load. This has meant that he is currently being supported by his partner who works part time in the Community Sector.  
As a result of his unstable and infrequent work Michael is unable to take out a loan, finds it difficult to budget week to week, considers his job to be at risk if he wants to raise an issue with the management, is suffering from severe depression and has no disposable income.

These four stories probably capture a cross section of the people our services deal with and represent the stories of many people their age in the rural and regional area that we live in. All of them have made their lives in this community. It is where they and their families have created innumerable community ties. They struggle to maintain a quality of life in the face of circumstances that are completely outside their control. SAPC is concerned that insecure work is contributing to the growth in people living in poverty and to becoming homeless. In addition we see that children do not receive the educational advantages of those with more secure work unless there is external support available.

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