

OFF THE BOOKS AND ON THE JOB: LIBRARIES AND COMMUNITY CENTRES SUPPORTING WORKERS IN TRANSITION

ABSTRACT

The social shock created by the withdrawal of the automotive manufacturing industry in Northern Adelaide will have far reaching effects for the community. As the employment landscape in Northern Adelaide undergoes a transformation, generations who have grown up with specific skill sets and assured job security find themselves in an entirely new job market which demands completely different skills and knowledge. Many workers find themselves unable to adapt to these conditions, resulting in unemployment and leading to negative flow on effects in already disadvantaged areas. Many such workers lack sufficient literacy skills to transition effectively. The sustained loss of manufacturing work has led to a major decline in job opportunities for men with only modest levels of formal education. In part this shows up in unemployment statistics. But it is also evident in the withdrawal from the workforce altogether.

In response to the announced closure of Holden (Elizabeth) in 2017, which will result in the displacement of thousands of workers, the City of Salisbury established a Working Group with the objective to developing partnerships, programs and services to be delivered out of libraries and community centres. Through the partnerships we established, we were able to identify key areas of need in the workforce that we as libraries and community centres were perfectly positioned to address. These identified needs included: adult literacy, digital competencies, and job seeking skills.

The programs and services we created in response were designed to provide participants with practical skills and development in these areas.

Importantly we also introduced a new group of customers that are not traditional users of our services - middle aged males with low literacy.

This paper will be based on research methodologies of a qualitative nature, and include the following: literature review, primary research undertaken through conducting the programs under discussion, and use of primary data sources including Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Social shock requires a response similar to large environmental disasters. Libraries and Community Centres can provide an agile and targeted response to fill gaps in services and provide ongoing sustained support to the community. The closure of auto manufacturing in Adelaide will have far-reaching consequences in the community. Not only will direct Holden employees be affected, there is also the supply chain, existing youth and long term unemployed, and unskilled labour force to consider. The City of Salisbury Libraries and Community Centres are committed to supporting the whole community, who may be facing significant changes in their personal and working lives.

A core function of Libraries and Community Centres is to improve literacies and as little as a 1% improvement in adult literacy levels can lead to a 2.5% improvement in productivity. As well as the socioeconomic factors, low literacy levels have been shown to link to poor health outcomes, cyclic poverty and welfare dependency, alongside higher crime rates. There are implications for participating in the

democratic process, understanding policies, voting, as well as being able to interact with government agencies.

PAPER

In 1919 J.A. Holden founded Holden's Motor Body Builders Ltd (HMBB), a new company based on King William Street in Adelaide and specialising in car bodies. Car manufacturing subsequently flourished in Adelaide. One area in particular that reaped the rewards of the industry was Elizabeth, an outer-northern suburb that developed from the 1950s onwards as a government stimulated housing development program. Throughout the 1950s the State's economic development was largely driven by manufacturing enterprises. People travelled from the UK under various schemes, to establish themselves as workers at the Elizabeth car manufacturing plant, and settled into a new life in Australia. Over generations, car manufacturing has become a way of life for many Northern Adelaide residents and their families.

In December 2013, Holden announced that it will cease vehicle and engine production by the end of 2017. As of 2016 the City of Salisbury and Elizabeth is home to around 1300 Holden workers and their families. In addition, there are thousands employed by supply chain companies, who will all be affected by the forthcoming closure. The projected impact of the closure by Adelaide University is that 23,000 people will be affected directly and indirectly 4 years past the closure and the Gross State Product of South Australia will be reduced by \$3.7 Billion (Barbaro, Spoehr and NIEIR, 2014, 7). The social impact at a time when the state's economy is sluggish post the mining boom is a major cause for concern for those

involved in supporting communities. How organisations and services respond in cushioning the impact of the impending social catastrophe is critical.

The City of Salisbury is in the early days of responding to the challenges which these changes present to our community, and the Libraries and Community Centres are central to that response. Responding to what is likely to be major social dislocation is at the core of community services and early responders are critical. This paper outlines how the Libraries and Community Centres early response can be formed by tweaking existing services and positioning strategically with partnerships.

About the City of Salisbury

The City of Salisbury is located 25km north of Adelaide, and is one of the largest metropolitan council areas of South Australia. Within Salisbury's 31 suburbs resides a population of over 135,000 people. There are five libraries, six community centres and a youth centre with the city. Throughout Salisbury's population there is a wide range of diversity in regards to cultural backgrounds, income, level of education, and employment. Northern Adelaide has experienced for some time statistically higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage. While there are some suburbs within the City of Salisbury that appear quite successful in terms of employment, income and education, there are other pockets of the community that fare very poorly in terms of socio-economic factors. These members of the community take advantage of the services and resources on offer at the Libraries and Community Centres and are a large customer base for these community assets.

The city is located five kilometres from the Holden Elizabeth plant, and recent figures from the company indicate that of the 1300 employees most live within the City of

Salisbury and surrounding suburbs. The majority of the workers are over the age of 45, male and have on average 18 years of service at Holden. Manufacturing is a major employer in Northern Adelaide with 15.8% of the population employed in the sector, compared to the national average of 9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

The employment climate

South Australia's growing unemployment rate is a widely accepted concern, with the state currently faring the worst in the nation. In early 2016, South Australia had an unemployment rate of 7.7% - a rate that continues to rise while the national average drops to 5.8% (ABC News, 2016). Business SA refers to the current situation as a 'crisis' that has been 'building for some time' (ABC News, 2015). A combination of factors such as a drop in commodity prices, rising production and logistical costs, lack of reform, and the cost of doing business in the state have been blamed for the situation (ABC News, 2015, & MacLennan, 2015). Youth unemployment is also a growing concern state-wide, which is reflected in Salisbury's statistics. 14.7% of the area's 15-24 year olds are unemployed, compared to the greater Adelaide average of 12.8% (Profile id – Social Atlas, 2016a). Since 2012 the number of unemployed 25 to 34 years olds has risen from approximately 9,000 to more than 13,000, with unemployment shortages threatening to 'define the generation and cause long-term damages' (Snape-Gothe, 2015,).

Undeniably, a decline in manufacturing jobs has contributed to the current situation. Significant in this decline has been General Motors Holden's decision to cease their operations in Australia. When production finally ceases in 2017, the already strained job market will suffer a considerable hit. Adding to the existing unemployed will be additional workers exiting the Holden's plant, along with those from allied and supply chain industries.

The issue of lower levels of education in the region also means there are considerable barriers to transitioning to the new economy. Only 37.5% of the population of Salisbury have completed their schooling to year 12, which is lower than the Greater Adelaide average of 47.1% (Profile id – Community Profile, 2016b). In regards to tertiary education, the City of Salisbury also holds lower statistics. 54.4% of the population hold no qualification, compared to Greater Adelaide's 46.3%. Only 9.1% hold a Bachelor or Higher degree, and 5.7% hold Advanced Diplomas or Diplomas. This is compared to the higher averages of 18.2% and 7.8% for Greater Adelaide (Profile id – Community Profile, 2016c). As auto and allied workers seek employment in new fields, competition for low skilled and entry level positions will rise, further affecting long term and youth unemployment.

When the region's manufacturing industry was at its peak, lower levels of formal education may not have been an issue for job seekers. However current decreases in the blue collar workforce now mean that generations who have grown up with specific skill sets and assured job security find themselves in an entirely new job market that demands a completely different set of abilities and knowledge.

The changing nature of employment

Working is a crucial part of our lives: not only does it allow us to meet our basic needs of food and shelter; it provides us with purpose, dignity, security, wellbeing and identity. The importance of having gainful employment has long been important, but what we do for a living continues to change. Economist Nathan Taylor (2015) explains:

Australia is on the cusp of the next wave of the industrial revolution. Like the previous technologically driven transformation, this revolution has the potential to radically upend business practices, change social arrangements and dramatically reshape the workforce. It is also likely to significantly improve the lot of households across the world while having profound implications for average Australian workers.

Australia's traditional blue collar workforce is in decline, with far fewer manual labour jobs in the market. Closure or automation of factories over the last 25 years has resulted in the loss of around 100,000 machinery operator jobs, nearly 250,000 technician and trade jobs, and nearly 400,000 labouring jobs. These losses have been offset by significant growth in the fields of community, personal, professional and business services, with more than 1 100,000 new jobs in these fields (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015, 5). These economic changes are widely recognised by policy makers. In the *Northern Economic Plan* (2015, 26), South Australia's Department of State Development acknowledges the need to manage the closure of General Motors Holden in the short term, while transitioning the state from an industrial base, on to a services and value-adding goods workforce. The plan outlines the need to use Northern Adelaide's manufacturing base as a platform to evolve from, while also adding new focuses to healthcare.

New skills for a new workforce

As the traditional workplace changes, so too do the skills, knowledge and experience employers will look for. In an economy where there is a decline in manual labour, and a rise in computerisation and automation, there will be some jobs that disappear, while others will survive or be newly created. For workers to thrive in this shifting economy, they will need:

- Digital literacy
- A high degree of human social intelligence and problem solving skills
- Creativity and innovation driven entrepreneurial skills
- Unique skills that put them at a competitive advantage, where their work is not at risk of computerisation, automation or international outsourcing
- High levels of education, knowledge and cognitive ability: brainpower
(Foundation for Young Australians, 2015; Frey, 2014; Green, Marsh & Pitelis, 2015)

Who will be left behind?

Rising rates of tertiary education along with a responsive curriculum may see the next generation of Australians well-placed to enter this rapidly changing workforce. There are also existing workers who have the skills, experience and confidence to easily transition into other fields. The changing nature how we work may also bring positive opportunities, in the form of lower barriers to self-employment, greater flexibility, wider markets in which to find employment, and the ability to become highly specialised (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015, 20).

Yet with opportunities for some sections of the community come risks and disadvantages for others, and there will inevitably be some people left behind. Those who have spent a significant part of their working life in the manufacturing industry will find themselves entering a completely new labour market that they may be ill-equipped to navigate. In peak production years of the auto industry, it was as simple as walking through the front doors to ask for work, with the promise of a well-paid, guaranteed job for life, regardless of experience, education or literacy levels.

Holden's Elizabeth plant has successive generations of families that have worked there, and it has become a way of life for many. Such security and availability of work has of course been positive, meaning that people from all walks of life were able to gain meaningful employment, from low-skill entry level workers and up. But it has also led to a legacy of certain levels of expectation and aspiration that may not align with where the job market sits now.

For some workers, transitioning into new employment will be a very difficult process, with men particularly at risk. The Foundation for Young Australians (2015, 5) explains:

...our factory floor workers have not seamlessly switched their hard hats for a healthcare job. Instead, unskilled workers, especially men, have stepped out of the workforce on mass. Over the past 25 years, nearly one in ten unskilled men lost their jobs and did not return to the labour force. Today, one in four unskilled men don't participate.

Government and industry actions to address the upcoming auto closures include a strategy titled Beyond Auto. Beyond Auto provides recent and current auto and allied workers with access to career counselling, referral services, and an individual

training fund. Those involved in Beyond Auto are trying to engage workers while they are still employed, to ensure a smoother transition into new work, ahead of factory shutdowns in 2017.

Responding to the challenge

The City of Salisbury has responded to the region's changing job climate in a number of different ways, both from a program delivery point of view but also from a strategic response, facilitating major infrastructure and economic development across the city. The role of Manager of Libraries and Community Centres has been recognised as critical to the development of the social capital of the city, and has been included in some non-traditional undertakings. These have included working on how the city can produce accelerated learning environments and how council can fast-track workforce development. As a result, the manager spends time learning about projects from a technical infrastructure point of view, connecting with contractors and state co-ordinating bodies to deliver workforce outcomes for the city. One example of this is the inclusion of the manager in a key strategic group of council working to bring together strategic and urban infrastructure. Current projects in development in which employment is a critical factor include the Northern Connector, Dry Creek Urban Development Projects, Northern Adelaide Irrigation Scheme and Food Park.

The Manager of Libraries and Community Centres recently prepared a cross council submission for grant funding to facilitate the development of a Food Park entrance way and transitional learning facility, leveraging a State Government initiative and working with the State Economic Development Board and Parafield Airport

Corporation. The project if funded will result in 21 million dollars of private sector investment on the site leading to hundreds of jobs, with a purpose built learning facility. The application involved research on workforce connections to industry, unpacking the private sector's business models, and learning what contribution could be made to activating the site by entrance ways, storm water and landscaping. These latter areas mark a clear shift away from the traditional domains of a Library and Community Centre Manager.

A key feature of the work in relation to these projects is identifying future social infrastructure needs, and creating connections and partnerships with a wide array of employment groups, state government and industry bodies. Strong partnerships and collaboration are essential in workforce development, allowing program gaps and design requirements to be identified and built around specific needs. This approach is positioning services and infrastructure to cushion the impact of change, and also puts Libraries and Community Centres in a unique position to design for program gaps in a much more informed and responsive way.

Libraries and Community Centres are well-versed in change and uncertainty, and are expert at adjusting their resources and services to remain relevant to the communities they serve. As Jeanette Woodward (2013, 81) explains, 'in general , public libraries have done a better job than most institutions when it comes to taking the pulse of contemporary society....the public library has always sought to identify gaps in community services and opportunities for enriching people's lives'. So in the first instance, a public library assisting workers in transition is a neat fit. Serving the members of their community that are disadvantaged has also been a long-held core

mission for public libraries. These long term economic and infrastructure strategies will pay dividends over time and the responses can be built into the existing social infrastructure of the city. This means Libraries and Community Centres co-ordinating their programming, identifying gaps, and delivering to what could be a new client group.

Within the City of Salisbury, the Community Centres and Library Service both work together to coordinate programming. New programmes have been developed to cater for wellbeing, and to support families going through change. The opportunity to share the community intelligence and resources has been welcomed by the team and a suite of new programmes is growing, with innovative partnerships being developed. This task is not just an internal one, it also involves networks across the city, including the Holden Transition Centre which offers a raft of services and supports for affected auto workers.

The city is also working collaboratively with Holden and the supply chain network to develop two specific programmes: one is functional literacy, and the other digital literacy. A key factor in engagement with the City of Salisbury by the companies has been the fact that local governments, and specifically Libraries and Community Centres are there on the ground locally within neighbourhoods well after the Elizabeth Holden's plant has closed. The proactive vision of the companies is to be applauded, working to ensure that their workers are transitioned to learning and supports embedded within their communities. This has allowed the City of Salisbury to strategically position itself in terms of delivery, with the diverse range of delivery locations, resources and hours of operation available.

For many workers in transition, informal learning opportunities will play an important role in allowing people to develop skills and confidence to re-enter the workforce. In particular, informal learning is ideal in addressing adult literacy, which has been identified as an issue facing a number of auto workers. Sally Thompson (2012, 142-143), CEO of Adult Learning Australia, explains that while Australia has a significant problem with adult literacy and numeracy, to date public policy has focused only on formal, competency-based training. This is despite the fact that research supports adult literacy is best developed through intergenerational and task-specific activities, involving 'purposeful engagement with other literate adults'. For first language English speakers, there is also a stigma attached to attending formal literacy classes. Libraries can provide people with opportunities to develop literacy in an environment that is informal and non-confronting, and 'this puts public libraries at the centre of informal lifelong learning and literacy'.

A good example of the City of Salisbury's response is the tweaking of programmes and the utilisation of the new networks to advertise to affected workers who are not traditional customers. This has resulted in workers accessing literacy programmes, and social engagement programmes such as the Men's Shed. Branding the Libraries and Community Centres alongside the responses from Holden and their supply chain has led to new male customers. Admittedly this has not yet been in droves, but a trickle. As noted by Jeannette Woodward, p89 'Libraries have always found men to be tough nuts to crack'. Men also suspect most people who attend library programs are women; '...men seem to know this instinctively and shy away from all-female groups'. This perception has been broken to some extent by the leveraging of the networks that have direct contact with affected workers.

Apart from these strategic and programming responses there are some very practical solutions which are also having an impact. The Library Service's collection is continually assessed to ensure there is a good supply of reference materials that support well-being and basic resume writing. A dedicated PC called the "Jobs Pod", with no time limit restriction to allow users to prepare resumes and research jobs. This PC has a series of job search and resume building sites loaded to facilitate looking for work.

Establishing a family corner at Holden's transition centre with reading materials and play items for young children helped to build rapport early with the Centre workers, and provided a profile to advertise programmes and materials.

Challenges

This is not a highly pre-planned response from the Library and Community Centres, rather it has been adaptive and to a degree experimental. This work has been achieved by taking advantage of opportunities, tweaking roles, seeking support from the team, opening doors, building relationships and understanding, and from just 'getting out there'. It has been about positioning, taking advantage of what's possible, and keeping an eye and ear to the ground. The challenge now is to work towards a more comprehensive strategy to respond in 2017 to what will likely be a slow steady trickle of increased demand for our services.

As there are finite resources to deploy, there is a perception that this response detracts from core customers - those most disadvantaged. Another perception is that auto workers already seem to attract a lot of attention and support so why

should already tight resources be directed towards them. Libraries and community centres are inclusive safe places for people to get assistance, as a result these services are being accessed and utilised by a multitude of people in the community. So in responding to the immediate crisis the response is building services which are highly valued and needed across the community, not just for one specific group.

Timing of delivery is a challenge as the companies balance the transition for workers with the need to continue their operations. For example, considerable time and effort recently went into developing a new programme that responded to a specifically identified need. Resources were secured, only to have delivery delayed by months as the companies grapple with complex re-rating of the plant and supply issues.

Building the capability of the team to connect with external partners is also a challenge. Finding opportunities for the team to connect in new ways requires some flexibility in staffing and in salary.

In terms of new programme development the innovative solutions and new partnerships are leading to a new way of doing business. Setting up the goals from the gap analysis and then strategic alliances with a range of service providers has resulted in free courses, as well as some which are funded directly by council.

The response required some roles to be adapted or newly-created within the Libraries and Community Centre staff. One such role now performs a co-ordination function for the team and a hands-on development of programme assets within the team. All of this work is balanced with the independent associations who run programming within the City of Salisbury's community centres, and their views on what can and should be delivered. The change management process for them has also been a key challenge; exposure to new ways of working and a growing

realisation that the impact on their communities will indeed be significant, whilst balancing the existing needs of the people they look after now.

Projected job outcomes on the previously discussed infrastructure and economic development projects are in the thousands. The next part of the response is to connect with workers in transition via the vast networks of partners and contracts, identify service gaps and determine what is possible for the Libraries and Community Centres to deliver.

In the role of Manager of Libraries and Community Centres for the past year the challenge has been keeping an eye on the operations (13 Sites, and 65 staff), whilst undertaking the more strategic work required to deliver on the employment agenda. Adding to this challenge is a significant new building project, a structure re-alignment, and the development of a community hub encompassing a new administration building, library and community centre in the heart of Salisbury.

Conclusion

The response work involves re-visioning traditional services to support workforce development and the broader engagement of a non-traditional customer base. Many staff are personally affected by the closure, so motivation to do something to assist is high. It is through small areas of change that the service can make an impact, and remaining responsive and continuing to build strong partnerships and relationships across industry and service-providers will allow for opportunities to be seized. The work in this area is not finished – it is just the beginning.

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