

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION (Aged Care) SUBMISSION

THE ELDERLY TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES

Introduction

We hear so much in the press of how old people are a drag on society and “With an ageing population we need more migrants to support the tax system” etc.

My idea is that 60 to 70 year olds are quite fit and capable of looking after themselves, and while not capable of working on oil rigs or doing night shifts etc. they are quite fit to work in the slower pace of hostels and nursing homes. If this was adopted then we would have older people staffing these hostels, and thus freeing up the younger people to continue in the productive economy. Thus we have 60 to 70 year olds looking after 80 to 90+ year olds.

The demographics work correctly. In 2003 there were 1.3 million between 65 and 75 and there were 900,000 in the 75 /85 range and 260,000 from 85/95 [Health Handbook 2004]. So one decade could look after the next two decades! Or there are 1 person in the 65/75 for every 1 person in the 75+ category.

Naturally not every one over 75 needs a carer. Many are helped by family and friends. But for those in a hostel there could be many 60+ people able to provide the hostel services: and I mean from Hostel Manager to carer.

How do you get it to work? Probably talking about working for the pension eg 10 hours per week is too radical. But if like the Army Reserve pay you made working as a carer for \$8 per hour tax free for the seniors you could have quite a workforce looking after the elderly in hostels.

This idea is used elsewhere. For example Parking Companies use retired people as parking attendants. In Japan the young work on the machine shop floor. As they age, they are then moved to stores, quality control, sales etc.

The Benefits

- a) 60+ would empathize with the 75+ much better than younger people working in aged care. They have no ambition to fulfil and unlike the young are not interested in career progression.
- b) By not working in the productive workforce they free up the able bodied 30, 40 and 50 year olds to work in the more stressful jobs of Retail, Hospitals, Automotive, Mining and Manufacture.
- c) Life with the elderly care is quite slow and hence the pace is not like the productive workforce of mobile phones, texting facebook and twitter. Imagine a 25 year old feeding an 80 year old versus a 65 year old, feeding the same 80 year old. Nature has built in the empathy needed for the particular age.
- d) They are not under financial pressure eg. Paying mortgages or buying a home and looking after a young family.
- e) Sick leave is not an issue as they are getting the pension. If someone falls sick a Relief could be easily called in.
- f) Elderly could use their skills eg. Nursing, even Doctors, Dentists age and Plumbers and Electricians.

- g) It would be an INNOVATIVE approach to old age and a POSITIVE approach to aging, by the older people feeling they are still contributing to society.
- h) It would best be approached as a Community Service rather than just another job.

The Drawbacks

- a) The elderly are less able bodied hence lifting patients would need assistance. But the young are not immune from back problems. Everyone should lift no more than 15kg for men and 9 kg for women regardless of age. There are ROBOTS being designed to do these tasks.
- b) Cooks may need to be provided by the 30 to 50 year olds, for continuity of the workforce, as I envisage the 65+ may wish to work 10 hours per week, and thus not be available for this job.
- c) There maybe vested interests eg. Carers Australia and other unions to be considered for the impact on them.
- d) How many elder workers would come forward can only be found out by a trial, and this will vary. It also depends on where the pension is set. In good times like now it may not be attractive but if hard times return there may be many 'volunteers'. But there is only one way to find this out – by trial.

In a Nutshell

I see the society divided into the PRODUCTIVE workforce and the NON PRODUCTIVE workforce. the elderly (and children) fit into the later category. But whereas we expect children to become productive, we (society) think of the elderly as a drag on society and a burden we all have to carry through taxes. Here is a method to renounce that stigma with the elderly looking after themselves. After all they have contributed and given us the society we have today.

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