

Ravi: Tales Of Work For The Dole

(Adelaide, 2015)

I first did "Work for the Dole" back in 2002 with Port Adelaide Central Mission, which later became part of Uniting Care Wesley (UCW) Nationwide. Despite having qualifications in IT, after a long and boring induction, I got put in the Community Housing Team to do gardening and home maintenance. Our base was at Regency Green, a multicultural nursing home, which was hard to reach by bus. We had a weatherboard lean-to, which stored our gear, housed our coffee and occasionally us when it rained. We were given the cheapest of personal protective gear.

Basically we were just a glorified "Jim's Mowing" service. We would go and do the gardening for Portway Housing Co-op, which was another division of UCW. The worst thing was gardening for the condemned ex-Trust houses that were going to be demolished in a few weeks time. We would be sent to do the same sort of needless jobs at other sites. At first, because I was under twenty-one, I only had to do twelve hours a week.

A year later, when I had to do Work for the Dole again, our work role had been expanded, not only were we gardening but now we were landscaping as well, but actually no one had any idea of what to do. We did the occasional house clean up jobs and gardening for Trans-Adelaide Railway's "Adopt-a-Station" program. Our work scheduling was always 150% random. Some times the jobs were really big, other times they were very small, and we would have nothing to do all day.

Next time I did Work for the Dole, I was referred to EmploySA and was put into a project called "Urban Oasis" which would be growing crops for Foodbank, and potting tube stock for assorted reforestation projects. The site was a vacant paddock out the back of Amcor abattoir in the Parks. At least I could get there by bus, and we were near a supermarket. This project was incredibly boring, with a lack of work to go around. You could only plant and harvest so many food crops at any given time, and you could only have so many people working around the uncomfortable potting bench. Even though I had some input into a designing a hydroponics project, the only good thing about that job was that I got my chainsaw certificate.

On my next "Work for the Dole", I was painting the inside of co-op houses owned by a variety of organisations such as St Vincent de Paul. Again, I wasn't supplied with adequate personal protective gear. We had the occasional cleanup after a co-op house had been turned into a hydroponic "grow house". My manager was complaining old bigot, who was getting his pension as well as a

company Ford Transit van and trailer, which he used to do dump runs on weekends for extra cash.

From 2006 onwards. Uniting Care Wesley expanded a lot in both the northern and southern suburbs. Hi-Ace vans started driving around the metro area with the Work for the Dole signage, and they also produced "hi-vis" shirts with the UCW logo screen printed on them.

Another four years passed, and I ended up back on "Work for the Dole". I only had 30 hours to fill, and I got referred to a place called Diamond House which had just gotten some new PC's that needed to be installed. The manager was nice, but after a few days, there was nothing much to do. It was a big waste of public money to put me there.

Eventually, I was placed back at Regency Green. Once again, there was a lengthy induction, I was not supplied with adequate personal protective gear, and I had to make the long bus trek out there. This time we were involved in a pilot program arranged by Charles Sturt Council. We had to do garden maintenance at eight homes, which turned out to be occupied by relatives of councillors. We also had to do garden maintenance at the Beit Shalom Synagogue on Hackney Road. By now they had dropped the gardening at the train stations.

Back in 2002, we were told that after the final day of our "Work for the Dole" we were eligible for \$800 credit towards a course, (however, you could not buy textbooks, as it wasn't cash, and it could not be redeemed against HECS). This "Training Credit" scheme was terminated later. As time went by, case managers had the right to extend your Work for the Dole time obligations, or to make you repeat your obligation if they said so. Sometimes we were required to work full-time, five days a week.