



Brotherhood of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

MEDIA RELEASE

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UPSKILLING NEEDED FOR PROSPEROUS, PRODUCTIVE AND FAIR AUSTRALIA

Tuesday's Federal Budget offers an opportunity to invest in a skilled, educated and healthy workforce, which is key to improving living standards for all Australians.

The prospect of increased economic growth and simultaneous decline in the number of Australians of working age over the coming decades, means that labour shortages will become commonplace. Assisting disadvantaged Australians to gain and remain in mainstream employment is key to enabling them to build a good life for themselves and their families.

Executive Director, Tony Nicholson, said

'Recent estimates show that 200,000 Australians, or 1.7% of the labour force can be categorized as 'Highly Disadvantaged'. This is a significant proportion of the work aged population that have little or no chance of being employed in future economies. Worryingly there are an additional 40,000 teenagers who are disengaged from both education and employment.

'Just as our children are benefitting from the Education Revolution, so must these pockets of disadvantage be addressed with strategic investment in lifelong learning. International evidence shows that Australia spends a relatively small amount preparing highly disadvantaged job seekers for work. Greater financial and political investment in the training and employment of highly disadvantaged people could deliver untold riches in productivity and efficiency.

'Tuesday's Budget offers an opportunity to jump-start this next revolution. By embracing innovative and meaningful education, training and employment, for highly disadvantaged Australians, the Government can demonstrate its commitment to a long-term vision of an engaged, efficient and prosperous Australia.'

The Brotherhood hopes to see:

- An increase in investment in the upskilling of disadvantaged job seekers.
- The removal of barriers to work, including the disincentives created our ageing income support system, which is increasing out of touch with contemporary patterns of labour and work in our country.
- A partnership between Government, business and the community sector to investigate and implement strategies to reverse labour under utilization and ensure that Australia has the workforce it needs for sustained prosperity.

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