

Future Employment Opportunities

providing employment opportunities for marginalised people

It's common for people who've been unemployed for a long time to suffer a deterioration in personal skills, confidence and self-esteem. So how do they get the experience and skills, let alone regain confidence, to apply for jobs and get back into the workforce?

Future Employment Opportunities (FEO) started looking at this widespread problem in central Victoria more than 25 years ago, assisting young people into work via personal support and employment training. Over time, job creation became its focus as FEO believes that this is the key to developing a vibrant civic community - reducing poverty and inequity and increasing economic security, personal dignity and freedom.

Today FEO is a community non-profit organisation which manages a range of employment projects designed to give people – mainly jobseekers – the opportunity to create work or activity for themselves. FEO has a robust operational model that supports business start-ups.

Eaglehawk Recycling Shop (ERS) is a flagship of FEO's efforts. It has boosted both employment levels and environmental sustainability in the Bendigo area since its inception in 1994. ERS creates job opportunities for long term unemployed people in a viable business of recycling (metals, wood, plastics, etc) and selling the recycled products back to the community. ERS intends to expand into recycling commercial and industrial waste and has just moved into a larger facility.

FEO also manages:

- *Community Recycling Ventures (CRV)*: seeks to replicate the successful ERS model of job creation coupled with recycling, reuse and waste reduction. CRV includes a step-by-step guide to help roll out the initiative in communities nationally.
- *TradeStart*: assists young people at risk of leaving school or currently unemployed. This social enterprise teaches new trade skills in a workshop environment, provides literacy and numeracy skills development, and it assists in securing work experience, apprenticeships and traineeships.
- *Enhance IT*: provides affordable computers and computer repairs to Health Care Card holders.
- *Workspace Australia Ltd*: accommodates start-up small business.
- *On Track*: provides a training and employment placement service for job seekers.

WHY SVA BACKS FEO

SVA supports FEO because it has an outstanding, nationally-recognised track record of establishing start-up social enterprises that are sustainable and create real social and environmental impact. It has demonstrated exceptional creativity and entrepreneurship in stimulating meaningful long term employment. And it has a comprehensive and detailed understanding of its strategic and operational issues and those of the social enterprises it supports.

GROWTH

FEO started life as a Community Youth Support Scheme project in 1981 and was replaced with the Federally-funded SkillShare program eight years later. In 1990 it moved into its current premises at the Eaglehawk Railway Station before expanding its focus, from 1992, to enterprise development and small business courses as a way of addressing the issue of insufficient jobs in the area.

FEO was instrumental around this time in the construction of an industrial park for start-up businesses. Known as Eaglehawk Enterprise Park, it now consists of 18 factories. It also provides the base for Workspace Australia Ltd which was formed in 1998 and now operates seven enterprise centres assisting 80 start-up enterprises.

Over time, SVA has provided FEO with portfolio management, mentoring, funding and consulting services and training to support its growth and transfer of knowledge in social enterprise. SVA also assisted in the restructure of the organisation which has increased understanding and communication across all of FEO's employment projects.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

FEO excels at managing sustainable entities that create real employment opportunities. Annually, there are more than 500 participants in FEO-facilitated training or enterprises and more than 20,000 customers making use of its goods and services. For example, at the ERS, 14 people are now in sustainable employment. Its recycling project has an annual turnover of \$400,000 and diverts 4000 tonnes of waste from landfill each year. Further, in conjunction with other Council projects, the amount of potential landfill diverted as a result of ERS's work has extended the life of the Eaglehawk landfill by at least nine years.

One of SVA's earliest projects with FEO was funding the establishment of its TradeStart program in 2005. Since then, 30 boys (aged 15 to 19) who've participated have either returned to school, started an apprenticeship or found work.

Financially, FEO has grown in independence, today generating 75 per cent its total income with several social enterprises financially sustainable.

Overall, FEO evaluates performance using SVA's Social Return On Investment (SROI) tool which captures economic and social return for a total, blended value. By that measure, the ERS has produced a total return of 4.4 for every dollar invested. This figure is due for revision in 2008.

WHAT'S AHEAD

FEO has finalised its strategic plan for 2008-2010 and will aim to double its income from \$2 million to \$4 million in order to create new employment opportunities. It will also seek to introduce new income-generating social enterprises which are financially viable.

A focus for FEO will be to replicate the success of the ERS through CRV. To this end, FEO has produced and launched the *Guide to Starting a Community Recycling Venture*, which outlines the concepts and benefits, along with a detailed guide on how to get started.

(see www.communityrecycling.com.au)