



## Australian Bahá'í Community

### Unemployment and Voluntary Work

The Bahá'í community regards work as both the right and the responsibility of every individual.

To deny a person the right to work (a right recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) denies that person far more than the financial reward that society provides for some forms of work.

Being denied access to work valued by and of value to society fundamentally demeans human dignity. So essential is it to human nature that our Faith regards work performed in the spirit of service as a form of worship and therefore the highest expression of human purpose. Meaningful work is a basic need of the human soul, as important to the proper development of the individual as food and shelter are to the body. Unemployment thus potentially denies both the spiritual and material needs of the individual. Accordingly we regard the abolition of unemployment as a priority social issue for Australia.

Our Faith also regards work of value to society as a fundamental responsibility of every member of society. As we know, considerably more than half the work carried out in Australia is unpaid - in the form of parental and home duties carried out by many in society, especially women. It is nonetheless of great value to our society.

In this context, both for the benefit of the individual and society, voluntary work is something that the Bahá'í community encourages.

The establishment of any coercive link between receipt of unemployment benefits and voluntary work is however open to potential dangers and abuses. Long term unemployment coupled with voluntary work would for instance result in most cases in individuals being condemned to a life of poverty and social exclusion.

In this context the approach our community recommends is one that enables those in society needing the assistance of volunteers to be helped to communicate their needs to unemployed people and for unemployed people, in time available to them not spent seeking paid employment, to be encouraged and assisted to undertake voluntary work. (Such assistance could for instance take the form of allowances to meet basic travel expenses associated with carrying out such work).

Also it would be preferable that any such voluntary work enhances the prospects of the job seeker finding financially remunerated employment and adds to his or her skills.