



PRIME MINISTER

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OPENING OF THE HERITAGE INDUSTRIES VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CENTRE

Mount Gambier SA

This is an occasion which represents the culmination of an important effort by the people of this community to provide meaningful assistance to the handicapped members of our society. I am particularly pleased that support for the centre has also come from Western Victoria, and from my own electorate.

This is very fitting because it reciprocates the assistance the people of Mt Gambier gave us when we were setting up the sheltered workshop in Hamilton. The people who were involved with the Hamilton workshop, including Tamie, visited Mt. Gambier and got some invaluable advice on how to go about things.

This centre will make a major contribution to the lives of the 120 handicapped persons it is designed to employ.

My Government is firmly committed to equality of opportunity for all Australians. And we wholeheartedly support programmes striving to enhance the security, dignity, self reliance and well being of the handicapped. Sheltered workshops make an essential contribution to these ends, giving handicapped people the sense of purpose, and usefulness that is fundamental to personal dignity, and self-esteem.

We are committed to the establishment of workshops of high quality and efficiency, which will contract better types of work, and increase handicapped employees' opportunities to earn more income. Workshops which will increase the morale of the handicapped workers, and enable more people to acquire the confidence and work skills necessary to graduate to outside employment. Workshops which provide first and foremost, a practical means by which people with residual disabilities can progress at their own pace, towards the day when they can compete with others in the open employment market.

The sheltered workshop must also provide for those people who suffer from severe chronic conditions, and depend upon the workshop for permanent, rather than transitional employment.

In catering for this latter group, the sheltered workshop must, at all costs, avoid any suggestion of stagnation. It should give long term employees with structured programmes, an access to quality contracts providing them with challenging and rewarding employment.

Last year, the Minister for Social Security, announced the Government's \$121 million three year programme under the Handicapped Persons' Assistance Act. This will enable eligible organisations to establish and develop - on a planned basis - services for the handicapped, such as sheltered workshops, activity therapy centres, and training centres and hostels.

The Act underlines the importance of the partnership of Government and non-government bodies in the provision of such facilities. The Government last year also carried out a survey of both sheltered workshops and activity therapy centres, subsidised under the Handicapped Persons' Assistance Act.

The results of these surveys will aid in future government planning and will also bring into clear focus the overall effort of all the agencies and organisations involved.

The National Advisory Council for the Handicapped, is also conducting research into matters which relate to handicapped people, and their special needs.

The Government sees the partnership of voluntary agencies and government bodies, as a central theme of rehabilitation in Australia. In fact, the history of sheltered employment in Australia is the history of a working partnership between the Commonwealth Government, and voluntary organisations for the handicapped.

Although the Commonwealth Government established its own rehabilitation service for handicapped people some twenty-nine years ago, it has always refrained from directly entering the field of sheltered workshops.

The most obvious reason for this, is the fact that sheltered workshops are more effective when conducted by voluntary organisations with government funding and encouragement. Community organisations are often better able to determine community needs and priorities and to respond to those needs with more sensitivity and awareness than remote bureaucracies.

Before 1967 there had been comparatively little development of sheltered workshops in Australia, although there were some in most, if not all, of the States. In June 1967 the new Sheltered Employment (Assistance) Act came into effect. And the succeeding ten years have seen amazing strides in sheltered workshops.

The number of sheltered workshops and activity therapy centres in Australia has risen by over five hundred percent. By 1974 gross production income of sheltered workshops had risen from \$2.2 million to almost \$17 million.

This Centre represents an excellent example of the cooperation between a non-government organisation, and the Commonwealth Government providing a service which benefits everyone.

The sheltered workshop with its cottage industry and market garden facilities does not only contribute greatly to the well being of its employees. It will enrich the life of your entire community and can serve as a focus for further endeavours to enrich community life.

I thank you for today's invitation which has given me a welcome opportunity to meet with members of your community, and to see at first hand, the results of your efforts to provide for some of the less privileged in your community.

It gives me great pleasure to declare the Heritage Industries Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, officially open.

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