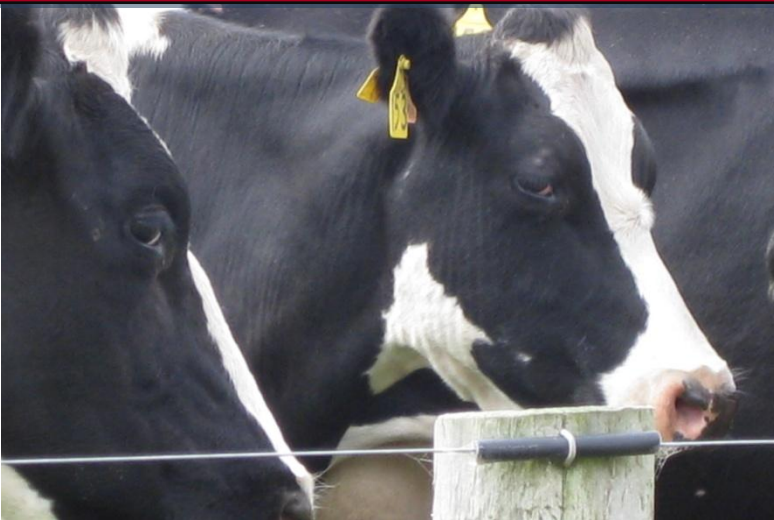


National Conversation about Work

Southland Regional Report



Contents

Introduction	p1
Process of engagement	p2
Weathering the recession in Southland	p4
What do people value at work?	p5
Issues	p7
Migrant workers	p7
Skill shortages.....	p10
Small and medium businesses.....	p10
Pay equity	p11
Youth employment	p11
People with disabilities	p12
Voluntary work	p14
Seasonal work	p15
Health and safety	p16
Working hours.....	p17
Work life balance	p16
Conclusions	p18
Recommendations	p19
Draft recommendations so far	p19

Introduction

Southland extends from Fiordland in the west, past the Mataura River to the Catlins in the east. To the north, Southland is bounded by the Darran and Eyre Mountains and to the south the region extends across Foveaux Strait to include Stewart Island. Southland is the southern most region of New Zealand.

The Southland population was 90,873 at the last census. Most Southlanders (50,000) live in the city of Invercargill, 28,000 live in the Southland district and 12,000 live in the Gore district. Apart from Invercargill, six centres have populations over 1,000: Gore; Mataura; Winton; Bluff and Te Anau. The proportion of the population who identify as European is 78.6% compared to the national average of 67.6%. Māori are 11.8% of the population compared to the national average of 14.6 %. A total of 7.6% of the people in the Southland region were born overseas compared to 22.9% for New Zealand as a whole.

The region's economy is based on agriculture, food and beverage manufacturing and health services which together employ 35% of all workers in the region. Other important industries are seafood and aquaculture, metal products manufacturing, business services and education. While sheep farming is the largest sector in agriculture, it has been declining over the last ten years as farms convert to dairying. This shift has required more workers in the agricultural sector as dairying requires more staff per farm than sheep farming. The Fonterra plant at Edendale is the world's largest raw milk processing plant.

Demographic data

The median age (half are younger, half are older) of the population of Southland is 38.0 years compared to 35.9 years for New Zealand as a whole. A greater proportion of the population are aged 65 years and older than that of New Zealand as a whole, but the proportion of people aged under 15 is about the same as the rest of the country.

In terms of qualifications a smaller proportion of the adult population of Southland have a post-school qualification than the

percentage nationally (32.2% compared to 39.9%) and a higher proportion of people in the region have no formal qualifications (35.6% compared to 25.0%).

According to the latest census, the median incomes (half earn more half earn less) is \$23,200 compared to the national median of \$24,400. Less than half (44.3 percent) of people aged 15 years and over in the Southland Region have an annual income of \$20,000 or less, compared with 43.2 percent of people for New Zealand as a whole. Fewer people have an income over \$50,000 than the national figure.

Employment

The unemployment rate in the Southland region is 3.5% in the year to December 2009, compared to the national average of 6.1%. The unemployment rate in the previous year was 2.6%. Labour force participation is higher than the national average at 72.9% compared to 68.3%. There has been a slight increase in the participation rate from the previous year.

The Commission visited Southland in April 2010 and included engagements in Invercargill, Bluff, Gore and Maitauro.

Process of engagement

The Commission met with 90 people in 19 different engagements - with employers and/or employees from key regional industries and with a range of local groups.

The Commission typically approaches regional development agencies and local government for advice about key employers in an area and to provide an overview of employment issues. We include significant and iconic industry sectors and businesses, types of work and workplaces we have not engaged with so far, and meetings with groups who are disadvantaged in the workplace. This regional summary report is the outcome of discussions with individuals and groups in the Southland region.

Reports are compiled after each regional visit. Participants were given the opportunity to comment on the draft report before

publication on the NEON website (www.neon.org.nz) and on the project website (www.haveyoursayaboutwork.org.nz)

The final national report will amalgamate the observations and insights from the sixteen regional reports. It will also incorporate information collected through other forms of engagement such as on-line submissions and meetings of national bodies.

The following groups and individuals were participants in the Southland region:

Farming

- Federated Farmers, Southland
- Dairy Workers Union, Fonterra Edendale

Manufacturing

- New Zealand Aluminium Smelter Rio Tinto

Local government and Economic Development Agencies

- Frana Cardno, Mayor Southland District Council
- Tracy Hicks, Mayor Gore District Council
- Jim Geddes, District Art and Heritage Curator Gore District Council
- Jeff Troon, Alastair Adam, Lisa Buckingham, Steve Canny, Sue Morrison-Bailey, Venture Southland

Seafood Industry

- Sanfords, Bluff
- Anthony Fowler, Oyster boat skipper, Bluff

Community groups

- Gerry Forde, Family South
- National Council of Women, Southland
- Business and Professional Women, Southland
- Rural Women, Southland
- Multi-Nations Council

Other

- Southland Disability Enterprises Incorporated
- Community Law Centre, Invercargill
- Southport, Bluff

- Southland Times
- Person with a disability (name withheld by request)
- Hamills Adventure Store

The usual format of the meetings were to introduce the project, followed by discussion. Meetings were about one hour long and were usually held in the workplace.

Conversations with employees were structured around the following key questions:

1. What do you like about working here?
2. What would make a difference for you to achieve equality at work?

These questions were followed by a general discussion about equality and fairness at work and what is needed to effect the desired change. Typically these discussions elicited a wealth of personal stories about work, both positive and negative and highlighted a number of issues related to fairness at work.

Conversations with employers focused on key issues which included:

1. What are your most pressing issues related to employment?
2. Do you need assistance to improve EEO in your workplace?
3. What kind of assistance would be most helpful?

We also asked people about the effect of the recession on employment and the labour market in the region.

Weathering the recession in Southland

The Commission heard that Southland went into the global recession with very low unemployment figures and unemployment still remains low relative to other regions. We heard in many meetings that there was a high level of employment and very high labour force participation. “Everyone that can work is working” we were told. There have been some effects however.

We heard that “businesses were using the recession as an excuse to get rid of staff”. These were characterised as non-genuine redundancies. Firms “could have performance managed them out.” People told us that jobs felt a little less secure, with the rise in unemployment. One participant told us there was “a wee bit more pressure to lump it” (i.e. put up with less than ideal working conditions) than before.

Volatility in dairy income had been a problem in the previous year. One manager told us that they were no longer in a “reduced staff situation” and that the market had turned. Another participant predicted that , given known development plans, Southland would require thousands more workers in about eighteen months time.

In one workplace redundancies were avoided by offering employees early retirement packages, shorter weeks (four day weeks) and periods of between six months to a year leave without pay to pursue travel or study with the guarantee of a job at the end of the leave period.

The cumulative effects of foreign exchange driven price fluctuations for dairy and decreased consumer demand had put pressure on farmers. As a consequence some farm owners were doing more on the farm and employing fewer staff, while other farmers were automating to reduce the demand for labour.

As in other areas, concerns were expressed about the disproportionate effect on young people, especially those with few skills.

What do people value at work?

Flexible work is prized by employees. People we spoke to who sought flexible work practices such as job sharing were disappointed and even resentful when it wasn't available or when an employer wouldn't at least try it. One person observed that men are increasingly able to take time for family such as caring for children and that there was greater acceptance of men stepping outside of their traditional roles.

People appreciate the support they get from their workplace when life events impact on wellbeing such as: ill health; marriage break ups; drug and alcohol problems; financial difficulties; and terminal illness. “My manager has been hugely supportive, whatever I’ve needed to maintain employment.” This support is also noticed and valued by other staff. Employers also talked about being supportive of family needs, “We’ve got a family too,” one employer said.

Employees particularly valued the social nature of the workplace, making comments about friendships developed at work and working with “one great big family” One group of employees talked about how much they valued the “tight team” they worked with. “Team work gets the job done.” Acknowledgement of everyone’s contribution was valued - “There are no chief and Indians here, everyone contributes”. However another group told us that division within the workplace “them and us” referring to managers and workers, increased group cohesion.

Decent pay was also important. “It’s the money that holds me here”, said one worker. “We’re fortunate; we’re in the top three percent wage earners in Southland.” This was attributed to a highly unionised work site. One participant told us that “his family could have a better life here than in Auckland.” An advertising campaign to attract people to live and work in Southland depicted this point graphically, pointing out differences in house prices among other things between Southland and Auckland.

We also heard about the importance of being in an environment of acceptance for people with disabilities. “There’s no judgement here” said one participant. Another said “It doesn’t matter what kind of disability you have, you feel safe.” “People understand each other.”

Social interactions at work flow into the community, which is particularly valued by people with disabilities who can be marginalised if they do not have opportunities to interact with non-disabled people. People talked about the satisfaction of coming to work each day and the confidence that is built through independence, for example of paying your own bills, owning a house and a car.

Opportunities for career advancement also mattered. In one workplace an employee's study was supported by the company. "It's just the rotation of life," said his employer, "we're giving him a stepping stone." Others talked about the opportunities afforded them in a smaller community. "You have much more of a chance to stand out here" one participant said.

Issues

The following themes emerged from discussions with people we talked to in the region:

- Migrant workers
- Skill shortages
- Youth employment
- Disabled people
- Voluntary work
- Pay equity
- Seasonal work
- Health and safety
- Working hours
- Small to medium businesses

Migrant workers

In various meetings in Southland we heard about community efforts to address bad employment practices and a commitment to ensure that both employers and employees know about their rights and responsibilities. The community response included "rescues" of migrant workers in difficult situations by various groups including Federated Farmers, church groups and the "tartan mafia". We presume this refers to a loose knit group of Southlanders of Scots descent.

The relatively recent and wide spread conversion to dairying has had two main consequences in the region. Firstly, there have been changes in farm ownership with an increased number of "absentee owners" and owners and managers coming from different cultures. Secondly, dairying requires more staff per farm than sheep farming and this led to an increased demand for farm workers a few years

ago. The demand could not be met locally and so recruitment of migrant workers was necessary.

We heard that a number of farmers were not used to employing staff, let alone staff from other cultures and this presented challenges for everyone concerned. Some employers have struggled with both the legal requirements of employing staff (including immigration issues) and interpersonal skills necessary to manage staff (compounded by cultural differences).

Models for assisting good employment practice in the industry are emerging. We heard that Federated Farmers are developing self regulatory mechanisms to assist prospective employees identify accredited employers. This is seen as important in terms of fairness for employees and to ensure that the reputation of the industry as an employer is not damaged by poor practice. “It affects the whole industry; they (fair employers) don’t like people muddying the mat.” Accredited employer schemes could include wages, accommodation, working hours (including time off) and the opportunity for employers to get together.

Tradenz have held seminars for employers and employment contractors, business groups had provided short affordable courses, local government organisations and the community law centre have also been active in assisting both employers and employees understand their rights and obligations. This activity has been driven by both the recession and the influx of migrant labour into the community.

We heard that a common problem, not just confined to migrant employment, was either the absence of or incomplete employment agreements. In some instances employment agreements entered into prior to migration were replaced with lesser pay and conditions once the person started work. Licensing immigration agents had limited this particular practice although it was argued that the Immigration Adviser Authority (IAA) needed “teeth and resources”. “The IAA have weeded out very dodgy operators but spot auditing is needed, it’s not good enough.”

The lack of feasible remedies for wage disputes was discussed by one group we meet. Currently the cost of taking a personal grievance to recover unpaid wages outweighed the outstanding wages . “Anything under \$5,000 was not worth pushing” we heard.

There has to be an “easier way to resolve these cases”. These sums may be “minor” but this amount of money means something to people. The time taken to resolve disputes was also a barrier. The need for more labour inspectors with a wider authority to intervene in wage disputes was called for. “Wages are a statutory right,” we were told. At the moment “labour inspectors can only act if people are being paid under the minimum wage.” “Migrants are too scared to complain.” And farm workers are not generally unionised.

Orientation on cultural differences for migrant workers was also seen as important. In particular, health professionals needed to learn about what was culturally appropriate in the way they spoke to patients.

Readily available information was critical, as not everyone has access to the internet. One group suggested that local migrant support agencies could be advised of the arrival of new migrants to the district so that support agencies could be alerted and the family welcomed soon after arrival. Face to face contact was seen as the preferred method of communication. A number of participants expressed their concern that the number and location of new migrants was not known in a district unless they attended a community event such as church, or their children attended school.

A number of participants commented that people with “hard to pronounce names” were discriminated against in employment. One participant observed “sexism and racism is alive and well in Southland. Feminism, the Maori renaissance and the self help movement have passed it by.” “Migrants don’t get invited into homes. We have our networks and we don’t need to go outside them”

There appeared to be an element of talking past each other. A group from Rural Women organised a big luncheon for 24 families which only one family attended despite personal invitations to everyone. It was felt that these families were “just passing through”. One woman reported “they said, ‘I’m here to make money, not to make friends’.”

Delays in processing recognition of qualifications on the part of the Qualifications Authority were said to be a problem by a number of participants. As elsewhere, the cost and length of time necessary

for skilled migrants to qualify in their field was viewed as prohibitive. The counter argument was put succinctly by one participant, “wouldn’t you want to know that the person who is doing the work knows what they are doing,” she said.

Skill shortages

We heard from various participants that management skills were lacking in both small and large companies. Companies which were part of a larger group (either nationally or internationally) experienced difficulties because decision-making was frequently deferred to managers who were off site. This led to both delayed decision-making and decisions which did not take account of the local context.

One participant commented that Curriculum Vitae (CVs) did not always reflect applicant’s skills and knowledge. “People put anything on paper”. Another told us that by and large Southland could attract the right person for the job, but that the problem was attracting their spouses. Attracting health professionals to the region required considerable community effort. Partnerships between local government, the community trust, DHBs and tertiary institutions have been developed to attract health professionals to the region. We heard that the most acute shortage was of dentists.

Small to medium businesses

Small to medium businesses face the challenge of employing people without the human resources and accounting structures and support available to larger firms. This challenge is met in various ways. We heard about software packages and training support specifically designed for SMEs but that these options were not always taken up. Some farmers for example have found that employing people is such a hassle that they have entered into different workplace arrangements such as share and contract milking so that direct employment of staff is effectively contracted out. Particularly difficult employment demands are the calculation of public holidays pay. One suggested solution was to simplify the calculation of public holidays pay so that it can be annualised.

Pay equity

Pay equity was discussed at one of the regional meetings. One woman talked about young people saving up for a car from after school and holiday jobs, “no matter what she (her daughter) does she will get less than a man”. Her advice to young women was to “look out for a boyfriend with a car.” Another disputed that pay inequalities were about discrimination. “We put barriers on ourselves, we don’t back ourselves or have enough confidence.”

Youth employment

As mentioned earlier, young people have been disproportionately affected by the recession both in Southland and in other parts of the country. Community initiatives to assist young people who have disengaged from school and are at risk of disengaging from participation in the community as working adults have been in place for a number of years.

The A.L.I.V.E (A Lifelong Inspiring Vital Experience) programme is run by Adventure Southland Limited. The aims of the programme are simple and life changing: to have participants work ready and matched to an employer or training option by the end of the course and to have 60 percent of course participants in employment or training or education within one month of the end of the programme. The 12 day residential programme and follow up mentoring programme is designed to assist young people between 16 and 19 years of age to move towards independence. Young people who have been selected for the programme are youth considered to be at risk of long term unemployment. Outcome data is impressive. The programme has been funded by Work and Income New Zealand for the last six years.

Another programme is Work’n it Out. All school leavers in the area are contacted to “check if things are going well”. Follow up checks are made every six months until the young person is 20, with their permission. Additional individual assistance is provided when needed. This can include career coaching, assistance with job search or getting further education, career advice and workplace support.

Assistance for employers and employees to enable apprenticeships is also available from the Southern Group Training Trust. The trust employs the apprentices, the employer pays the trust for the apprentice’s time and the trust employs training managers to support and mentor the apprentices. This takes much of the risk and uncertainty about taking on an apprentice from employers and also ensures that apprentices are well supported throughout their apprenticeship.

People with disabilities

In Southland, the people with disabilities that we met were people in full time work, predominantly in supported employment.

We met managers and staff at a business that provides employment for people with disabilities. The business offers a number of supported employment options. Approximately one in four workers is in mainstream or open employment. A work broker assists both employers and the disabled employees to ensure the employment is successful. "It's important we don't set up anyone to fail," we were told. If the employer has a bad experience they are less likely to employ a person with a disability again, and if the employee has a bad experience they lose confidence.

The business also supports a small specialist work team at a large industrial plant in the area. This collaboration has been successful for eleven years now. Workers in this team earn above the minimum wage and are an integral part of the plant's workforce.

The third employment situation is based in various worksites and directly employs people with disabilities engaged in a number of jobs mostly related to recycling ventures. Opportunities for positions of responsibility (team leader positions) were available for people with disabilities.

Support structures included "giving back control to people". Team leaders were asked what managers could do better. Other forms of support included weekly meetings about health and safety risks assessments and daily meetings about the tasks of the day. There were also monthly meetings about any concerns or issues in the workplace. New employees were given a book, illustrated with photos, which provided a breakdown of the tasks required for their job.

Workers in this third situation have minimum wage exemptions based on productivity assessments. Minimum wage exemptions and the place of business enterprises which offer supported employment were a focus of one of the Southland visits. Businesses must apply to the Department of Labour to employ people below the minimum wage. A productivity assessment is undertaken and the wage set at a percentage of the minimum wage based on that assessment.

The business originally developed their own productivity assessment system but are now required to use a Department of Labour directed, revised assessment system, which has led in most cases to a lower assessment of their productivity level. This process is used to enable businesses to employ people who would not otherwise gain employment in the open labour market. Minimum wage exemptions were a compromise reached when legislation permitting sheltered workshops was repealed.

We heard that employment was a more desirable alternative to community participation programmes. “There is dignity in labour” we were told. Income from work paid below the minimum wage was supplemented by benefits.

“ Even though I present positively and appear that there is not a lot up with me (and I would imagine the same would go with other like people in the community), the daily challenges are many. At work I find that I try to keep one step ahead of everyone always planning and preparing in advance so that in my role, I don’t appear to be incompetent, needy or different from anyone else. Some days are a frustrating struggle because my (condition) is so variable it’s difficult to know how I will be on any given day, it just depends how you are when you wake up in the morning and you build from there.”

Another participant echoed the comments made by Paul Curry in the National Conversation introductory video. We heard that “you have to work to harder to prove your worth” and that people see your disability not your ability.” The challenge of living with a chronic condition that has a varying impact on daily functioning was explained to us:

The importance of building public perception to the normalcy of disability was stressed in the meetings we had. “Disability is a normal part of life, its part of who you are”. “People on television are glossy and glamorous; you don’t see people with disabilities there.” A social marketing campaign aimed at employers and

others in the workforce similar to the Like Minds Like Us campaign promoting people with disabilities in the workplace was suggested.

Voluntary work

Frequent reference was made to the community /voluntary sector support for the cultural, sporting and social life of the Southland community. One participant observed “that for a politically conservative region the strength of the community is almost socialist.” “The unique advantage Southland has is the amount of community capital” it possessed. Many participants referred to the availability of funding from various trusts (licensing trusts and community trusts) that enabled their work.

In other regions, the NGO sector reported decreased volunteering and an ageing of the volunteer sector workforce. In Southland, a number of participants commented on their reliance on volunteers and also that they had not observed any “drop off in volunteers”. One business woman who volunteered her time at her children’s school and in local sport said “I’ve been brought up like that”.

Other participants said that they’d observed that volunteers were ageing. “There are no young ones coming on” “life is busier now” because in many families both parents work. We heard some discussion about the high expectations of young families in relation to their material well-being. “My kids expect to walk into the same level of accommodation which their parents have taken all their life to accumulate.” They put “pressure on themselves.”

Grandmothers are supporting families by providing after school and holiday care of their grandchildren. “Grandparents are having a much more direct role in raising children,” we heard.

There was some support for extending paid parental leave “Having one parent paid a wage until the child is four that would take a lot of pressure off.” One participant disagreed, “having children is a choice and comes at a cost. I don’t agree with paid parental leave”.

Regular and often highly skilled voluntary work is a feature of community participation in cultural and sporting life in the region. For example: Netball Southland rely on volunteer coaches, bench staff and other officials and administrators at all but the very top level of the sport; and the work of the arts and heritage group of

the Gore District Council was supported by volunteers who included highly skilled historians and experts in restoring and preserving historic artefacts. In both cases voluntary work effectively underpinned the creation of the handful of paid jobs, which in turn provided a level of skill and leadership that opened up more interesting opportunities for volunteers.

Volunteering also included directorships on various community boards, which enabled considerable cross-fertilisation of good practice and community support for the work of the community ventures. A number of participants commented on the governance skills evident in the community investment decisions made by the three principal trusts in the region. We heard that the three trusts invested \$20 million a year in the community and this had not been reduced as a result of the recession.

One participant told us of his concern that the voluntary sector, and by implication the trusts, were now being asked to supplement organisations that used to be funded by central government.

Seasonal work

The Southland economy includes industry sectors with seasonal demands for labour, for example: tourism; fishing and aquaculture; and agriculture. We heard that work with a very short season can be difficult for staff. The oyster season, for example, is subject to the weather, the quota and demand for fresh oysters. Oysterman may only be out (and earning) 20 days in a season. The average age of oyster openers was between 63 and 65 years old.

Smaller businesses in the region compete for workers with larger plants such as the smelter, the meat works and Fonterra dairy factory which are able to pay better and for a longer season. Professional sports women could also be said to be in seasonal employment, with work demands (training, games, travel and sponsorship activities) effectively requiring full time attention for seven months of the year. Alternative sources of income have to be found for the rest of the year.

One business managed fluctuating demand by employing part – timers whose work hours varied seasonally. High season demand was also managed by owners doing more. Some workers and businesses smooth out the income with complementary seasonal

work. However, this is not always possible. Seasonal work for some workers means longer working hours for nine to ten months of the year. The effect of long working hours is discussed below.

One of the consequences of seasonal demand in the dairy industry is school funding. We heard that school funding is calculated on the school roll in May, which is the changeover period on dairy farms. School rolls drop in May and then increase again in June and July with the next influx of migrant families.

Health and safety

A commitment to ensuring safe workplaces was evident in many of the workplaces we visited. Two of the workplaces used a system called Take 5, which involved each work team discussing health and safety risks. Managers talked with pride of their goals of zero injuries, and the risk assessment and injury prevention measures taken to achieve that.

The regulatory environment which underpins health and safety is important. We heard about Department of Labour officials visiting worksites to discuss hazard identification, risk assessment and measures required to make worksites safer. Awareness of the consequences of a workplace accident which has resulted from not following health and safety procedures (i.e. prosecution) also appear to be a powerful incentive for increased safety conscious behaviour.

The ACC partnership programme allows large employers to take on the responsibility of managing their own workplace health and safety, including claims management and rehabilitation of their own employees following a work injury. This appears to be working well in some workplaces and less well in others. In one workplace we heard that all “justified claims are accepted as work related” and this is assured by working through a third party administrator who manages each claim and undergoing regular audit by ACC. “In my opinion I would have to say that our acceptance rate for work related accidents would be higher than ACC’s acceptance rates.”

In another workplace, also in the ACC partnership programme, opinion was divided. On the one hand we heard that in house management of rehabilitation resulted in a much more effective

return to work rate after an injury. On the other, we heard that injuries incurred in the workplace (resulting in long term disability) were incentivised to be reclassified as out of work injuries, and Lost Time Injury (LTI) statistics were minimised by returning people to work very soon after an accident, a practice that was not necessarily in the injured person's interest. For example, we heard that people who were too incapacitated by injury to drive were being transported to work long distances in a taxi.

Emotional wellbeing was discussed in several of our meetings. Southland has one of the highest rates of male suicide in the country according to the 2009 Social Report. One man talked about the "emotional burden men carry to be the big man". Another person said that in his workplace drinking was part of the coping strategy. "You just suck it up" at the end of a tough day. This seemed to be especially true for men. One man said "if you share your worries with another man it's seen as a bit gay."

We wondered if this comment signalled an environment in which being actually and openly gay was not accepted. This was confirmed. "It's not safe to be gay in Southland" we were told.

Working hours

As in other regions, seasonal work is often accompanied by long working hours. The combination of long working hours and anti social shift patterns impacts on family life. Working hours was believed to be a contributing factor to marriage break ups. A shift pattern of six + three (three days on, three nights on and three days off) was particularly difficult for families. Because the first day off comes after a night shift, it is spent sleeping and so only two days are left for recreation. If the person is recalled early to cover for a co-workers absence time off is further curtailed. We heard that on this shift roster, days off coincided with weekends only once every seven weeks.

Recall is common because company staffing levels are based on a model of lean manufacturing. In effect this means unplanned leave (such as sick leave) must be accommodated by other employees working overtime or additional hours. A combination of long working hours and a cutback in training has led to an increase in accidents.

Working hours in the dairy industry were said to be “ugly”. We heard that the old standard was one milking off a week, then one day off a week and now three days off a fortnight was seen as standard. Longer periods of work without days off were seen as “taking advantage”. Working days were long, starting with a 4:00am start and finishing at 5:00pm. We heard that this included an hour for breakfast and an hour for lunch and periods of the day that were “fairly cruisy”.

Conclusions

The effect of the global recession appears to have had a less severe impact on Southland than other regions we have visited. The region went into the recession with very low unemployment and unemployment is still low by national standards. Labour force participation is high. As in other areas the impact has had more of an impact on young people than other groups.

There are a number of local programmes to assist young people into employment and these initiatives are supported by community trusts which are highly regarded in the region.

Recent dairy conversions have required a larger workforce than the local labour market can supply. This has been challenging for both employers and community support agencies. The high level of community capital and what we observed as strong community values about fairness has contributed to local solutions being developed to support both employers and employees. Safeguards, however, are needed to ensure poor employment practices are addressed.

The regional economy is predicted to grow significantly in the next few years and the demand for migrant labour will continue.

Recommendations

Southland is the fifteenth region visited during the project.

New recommendations which emerged during the visit are:

- A national dairy farm code of conduct be developed with Federated Farmers to guide employers on best practice and to signal to employees that a farm meets employment standards. The code would include: working hours, days off, formal employment agreements which are agreed by both parties and minimum standards of accommodation.
- A social marketing campaign promoting the employment of people with disabilities be considered as a mechanism to increase participation in the workforce.

Draft recommendations from the regions so far:

Youth employment strategy

- Cross party commitment to a national youth employment strategy. A multipartite approach which includes government, unions, employers and the education sector with a ten year framework to avoid a piecemeal approach that is subject to the vagaries of the three year election cycle.
- A specific focus on Māori employment outcomes as the issue of youth unemployment is particularly acute for Māori youth.
- Youth employment and education to work transition programmes such as the Youth Transition Service should be prioritised.
- Promote the provision of relevant employment rights information for young workers in accessible and creative formats

Good employer advice

- Business skills development. Mentoring for business start ups is supported by the provision of funding from the Ministry of Economic Development.
- Good employer advice. The Human Rights Commission in partnership with employers develop a register of best practice good employer advice.
- Government incentivise EEO and diversity training in both the private and public sector by providing tax relief on training expenditure.

- Government agencies provide disaggregated labour market data for cities over 35,000 people to aid planning by local economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and other agencies.
- The provision by government agencies of labour market data more specifically relevant to smaller towns within regions.
- Development of a whole of community approach by Economic Development Agencies to threatened layoffs in the community.
- A programme for the delivery of EEO into the wider NGO community should be developed in partnership between the Human Rights Commission and NGO's including Māori service providers.
- Invest in improved regional opportunities for manager training to ensure retention of skilled employees in a globally competitive labour market.
- Greater education by employers' groups (Chambers of Commerce, EMA's, Business New Zealand) to SMEs around work trialling ensuring the work rights of employers and employees are protected.

Low incomes

- Government index the minimum wage to the cost of living and regularly increase it to improve income and equality.

Pay and employment equity:

- Promote a pay and employment equity review in local government
- Implement response plans where reviews have been undertaken
- Active EEO programmes including scholarships to encourage and support men to work in early childhood education.

Migrant employment

- Inter-regional co-operation in the migrant labour approval process. Joint ventures between employers from different sectors and different regions would be considerably aided by this.
- Compulsory registration of contact labour employers bringing workers in under the RSE scheme.

- Ensure Department of Labour offices are located in areas where pastoral care and accountability issues in the RSE scheme arise.
- Access to language education from the outset
- Co-ordinated support for both employers and employees to ensure harmonious employment relations throughout the region
- Both Department of Labour and industry sectors actively promote good practice.
- Department of Immigration to monitor employment practices once migrant employment is approved. Working conditions monitored must include minimum wage compliance and working hours.

People with disabilities

- The Mainstream programme extended into local government. This would encourage more employers to employ disabled people.
- Review the impact of minimum wage exemptions to ensure the intent of the repeal of the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act is being honoured.
- Active EEO programmes in the public sector to increase the employment of people with disabilities in order to provide a model of best practice to both the private and public sector.

Working hours

- Local authorities who regularly hold lengthy night meetings are urged to review the demands placed on staff to ensure reasonable working hours.
- Investigate corporate volunteering as a model for employers and employees in a recessionary climate that is forcing nine day working fortnights
- Ensure that material about managing shift work includes advice about reducing the impact on relationships, as well as health and safety advice.

Working Parents

- Extension of paid parental leave to seasonal workers with continuous attachment to the workforce.
- Child care costs become a tax deductible expense. The prohibitive cost of childcare would be removed as a barrier to the full and equitable participation of women in the workforce.

- Strongly advocate for child care provisions that better meet the needs of rural communities, and parents who work non-standard hours.
- Investigate whether there is an unintended negative consequence to the accrual of annual leave during parental leave and if so, how that could be remedied.