During the initial period of my unemployment I suffered from RSI. It was NOT carpal tunnel syndrome NOR arthritis as defined by the Canberra Charity, it was tenosenovitis and easily recognisable as being caused by the tendons. I could NOT get a doctor to treat it and I knew of at least 2 other women that I worked with that had also got it. At its extremity it causes intermittent paralysis of both hands, gut quivers that are incessant and until you get used to the quivers extreme problems with short-term memory. Linament for arthritis just tightened up the soft tissues and I could not move my neck and left arm, exercise for arthritis caused paralysis.

After several months I was diagnosed by a long-term GP, Dr Poli with arthritis, which I disagreed with. I was also looked at by Commonwealth Dr Clifford. It was revealed by Freedom of Information that he had diagnosed a Withered Arm. There was no withered arm. After months of suffering and no treatment CES sent me to CRS who, rather than assist me find another GP follows instructions from Dr Poli. I was told to relax for stress that I did not have and got physiotherapy on my muscles. This did nothing and is the same procedure for all of the people since that I have met with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome sufferers have to have an operation on the inside of their wrists (it is the tendons) and the pain comes back. Carpal Tunnel Proper have to have the fingers operated on as they curl up and will not operate (I have met one). CRS recommended I do a course at Perth TAFE and as I did too many hours I was put back on Newstart to apply for jobs I could not physically do, but which I was intellectually able and qualified to do. TAFE invited several MP’s and two Doctors. Dr Tierney and Dr Potter. Dr Tierney said it was the tendons and offered a curative drug. Dr Potter diagnosed arthritis or Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and said she had it. I could not remember the name of the drug NOR the address of Dr Tierney’s rooms. For some time I drifted from GP to GP being told there was no treatment and by Rheumatologists and the Arthritis Foundation that it WAS NOT Arthritis. FINALLY Dr DeSouza, a collegue of Dr Poly sent me to have my gut looked at AND to another physiotherapist who bent my hands back very forcefully. The TENDONS in the palm of my hand jumped visably, he scraped a pin over the palm several times and the tendons jumped again. I was diagnosed with tenosenovitis and Dr DeSouze gave me a three week course of ORUDIS slow release 200mg, 3 a day which completely cured the problem. It is a very strong anti-inflamatory predominantly for arthritis although it does not cure it. It does cure tenosenovitis.

I still had to face the restriction at CES that said I could not work and could not type because I had a PERMANENT disability. However, during this time CES sent me to learn EVERY wordprocessing system they could get their hands on whilst still refusing to refer me to anything else. I was then picked up by the Community Mental Health Team and taken to hospital and diagnosed with schizophrenia. On getting used to the sedatives I gained a copy of the Mental Health Report and Application for Pension which I had not been allowed to see and had just been told to sign it. The report stated that I was not suitable for work as my typing was too slow amongst other untruths. I had two medicals and passed a typing test at 71wpm, 98% accuracy. 98% is the benchmark and 65wpm is the TOP award level. DSS accepted my submission and I came of the pension and back onto Newstart. I could not get the blackban lifted until CES finally closed. By this time EVERY EMPLIOYMENT AGENCY in town knew that I had had RSI and that the Government considered it to be permanent and recurring. I could not find another qualification to do that would get me a job and applied for everything I could do. Woolworths as an example took the time to write to me to tell me to stop applying for their range of jobs and apply for Administration Jobs. At around this time I was over 20 years long term unemployed and could not get into Uni because I had not done the Maths. I could NOT get permission to do Year 12 Mathematics from Centrelink. I had done Year 11 and stopped and passed English and Biology at Year 12 Level. I could not get Austudy to do Year 12 subjects, it had to be higher.

I had been advised at the onset of problems with RSI by a Legal Worker to apply for Freedom of Information to correct errors and inconsistencies. On one instance I found a Centrelink Officer had tried to get me cut off because I had refused on 3 occasions to give her my telephone number. I did not have a telephone and had explained this. Because of a “strange” verbal interchange between a Manager of Job Find in Maddington where she had directed me to ask CRS if they had any full-time positions I requested Freedom of Information from them and was REFUSED point blank.

I was being told by new staff at Centrelink that I should apply for part-time work (that is a breach of Newstart regulations and I would have been cut off). On one occasion a psychologist sat at a desk to collect my form and asked if I had anything to talk about. I told him that there were fewer jobs, but I could still find them and asked for the form to be received. Eventually I was told by a Centrelink Officer that she wanted me to go on to Austudy to study Computing (a Year 12 subject) I tried to explain to her that I could not GET Austudy to do a year 12 subject as I had checked and she cut me off. I checked through Centrelink Freedom of Information in Perth and I did not fit any of the categories for the 3 monthly payment and Centrelink would not accept me back onto fortnightly payments. Several months later a Centrelink Social Worker applied to become my Guardian and said I had schizophrenia. The State Administrative Tribunal had no-where to go as I had not income, my property was falling into disrepair and the Social Worker stated Centelink’s position, that “she is not suited to Newstart”. A Public Guardian and Public Trust were granted on a temporary basis of one year. They both stated that I did not need them.

Coming out of the cloud of sedatives I continued my tirade of Freedom of Information from DEWER regarding Job Find. I discovered that they had listed me as schizophrenic AFTER Centrelink/DSS had removed it and without my knowledge. Employers/Employer bodies were thus informed of such and I was not. During this period also as I considered myself to be fit and healthy a psychiatrist from the Mead Centre looked up old clients and said he checked Medicare to see if I was taking medication. He had me picked up and insisted I was on a pension. It took a Social Worker and myself a good half and hour to get through to him that I was in fact unemployed and on New Start and had to attend Centrelink to put in my form AND attend Job Network. The Social Worker also improved the waiting time I had to put in my form, which could be up to an hour as officers avoided me. It took 10 minutes. He insisted on sending two nurses around each fortnight with the Police whilst I objected, to give me an injection until a Sargeant stopped it.

I have recently completed a Certificate IV of Mental Health and hope to gain a job as either a Peer Worker or Support Worker (I have the Support Worker Certificate) working in mental health, with homeless people or dealing with domestic violence. I have been cleared as “of sound mind” by a consulting psychiatrist and in remission by my GP. I have requested a further review by the initial diagnosing psychiatrist who promised she would give me one when my sleep pattern settled down (I had come off two sleeping tablets with anti-psychotic and was addicted). She vaguely promised that she would further reduce my medication OR that I could come off it altogether. I have not had any symptoms (negative psychosis – dejected, depressed, anxious) for a very, very, long time (years) and despite several reductions in medication I have remained stable. Because of the amount of face-hours at TAFE (I went early also) and the homework/assignments that had to be done it is agreed that 29 hours a week is a very, very safe amount of hours for me to work without any problems. I am hoping to get a letter from the psychiatrist to state that I am in remission also, although this is usually considered to be temporary. I intend to stay stable and work for a good many years.

The BLACK BANNING element is unreliable (it’s DISABILITY listing is wrong) in its selection of disabilities and harmful. As well as preventing employment it could cause psychological damage over years of applying with no result. I believe it is discrimination and is illegal. The continual training in one stream of employment with the exclusion of all others is also not helpful. Employers do not want someone passed out on umpteen workprocessing systems with ABOVE award typing speeds. I was being refused ALL other training entries apart from the CRS approved TAFE course. I was refused permission to complete Mathematics 2AB at year 12 level that could have given me Uni entry. I had excellent passes with just the English and nearly enough marks to get in on its own. I still do not have arthritis although my typing speed is down to around 40wpm.

All in All I was NOT given assistance to gain employment. I was PREVENTED from gaining employment for nearly 30 years. I was applying well above the required two jobs a fortnight as were most applicants as required by the Job Network Member. Voluntary Work was either non-existent or had no work content – I tried. Work for the Dole was scarce and restricted to “improving your skills” and I applied and got no response.

I am now applying for jobs and have been allocated a Disability Job Network provider. I hope to get one and am trying to widen my field. As stated I am fit and healthy and have no symptoms to control, merely the side-effects of medication, hopefully soon to be removed. I hope once again, to become long-term employed as legislation permits. I am fit, energetic, positive, determined and hopeful and now, once again qualified in some form of employment and offering employers the $10,000 over two years wage subsidy. I have a new lease on life.

I think the effects of the changes in Newstart compliance will see more long-term unemployed diagnosed with negative schizophrenia – dejection, depression and anxiety as their savings diminish and the job hunt continues. This will increase the cost to the Government. I also feel that the side-effects of sedatives and anti-psychotics of confusion, loss of memory and lack of concentration leads the way to dementia. Had I been able to go onto Austudy I would have.

The monetary amount is NOT ENOUGH for long-term unemployment. There were no employer incentives for employing long-term unemployed. There were no traineeships for older applicants. The three monthly subsidy put in place by the Labor party was gaining three months only, over and over again to the same employers who were taking part, no on-going employment. As time goes on the job applicants will NOT be able to continue compliance. I now cannot find two jobs a day with my new qualification and I am trying to broaden the field. I COULD possibly get a job with ACTIVE full-time for $40 a week, but I think I can aim higher than that (one fellow consumer has done that). There are now some OLDER faces turning up in shopping centres and Post Office, though not yet banks.

I have gained a great deal of support after years of unemployment and will continue to apply

I would like to state that in every instance the Department of Social Security has taken the opportunity to correct any record or procedure as necessary. It is specifically the Newstart requirement to REDUCE the number of applicants (by almost any means) that is the problem. Job Network did NOT want me as an on-going, and going no-where client and the BLACKLISTING was the start of the problem under DEWER control NOT D.S.S. It is Newstart administration that is the problem along with discrimination.

Ann Morris.