

The PRIME Initiative Partner Newsletter Autumn 2006

Welcome to The PRIME Initiative's newsletter for business advisers. PRIME is a charity linked to Age Concern and the Prince's Trust. It helps people over the age of 50 set up in business or become self-employed.

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1. New age law says it's still fine to help the over 50s

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 come into effect on the 1st of October. The objective of the new law is to assist people facing age discrimination. Unfortunately some people have got the wrong end of the stick, and think it actually outlaws efforts to help the victims.

It doesn't - but PRIME has been contacted by partners worried about whether they can still offer workshops or do outreach work explicitly targeted at the over 50s. Don't worry - you can. But these concerns are understandable. We've had a newspaper advertising department attempt to turn away a PRIME ad because it mentioned 50 plus. They immediately reversed their policy when the true situation was explained.

The confusion arises because to help a disadvantaged group you often have to target it and offer special provision. People who haven't read the regulations assume this isn't permitted - but it is.

Regulation 29 explicitly allows positive action to "prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to age". The DTI's own guidance makes it clear that disadvantage includes things like the under-representation of a particular age group in the job market, or exceptional difficulty getting employment. There is abundant evidence that this is the case for the over 50s.

The test here is similar to exceptions provided in other anti-discrimination laws such as the Race Relations Act, which also allow support organisations to assist particular disadvantaged groups. In fact the age regulations allow even more latitude - you don't have to produce evidence the age group is disadvantaged but merely assert that this appears to be the case to you.

You can read the statutory instrument that brings the Age Regulations into law at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061031.htm#29> - including the key paragraph 29 that provides you with all the authority you need to provide age-related programmes.

However, if you are having difficulty reassuring an advertising person, venue manager or potential sponsor, PRIME would be happy to provide enough evidence to make their toes curl if pointing to the law itself doesn't work. The over 50s really do have a difficult time in UK's job market - that's precisely why this legislation was passed.

Unintended consequences are the bane of law making. In this case the confusion will soon pass, as people notice that Age Concern - which lobbied hard for this legislation, hasn't felt the need to rename itself Concern, or that Help the Aged - another strong supporter, hasn't turned itself into just Help.

Basically the law on this occasion is sensible. It doesn't in any way outlaw efforts to help ageism's victims or get them back into work.

Meanwhile here are some stats to bludgeon doubters with:

The employment rate for those aged between 50 and state pension age is 70%. This compares to an employment rate for 25-49 year-olds of 81%. (Source: Labour Force Survey). So it's a lot lower. The Government's own target is to get it up to 80%.

In the UK 1.5 million out of the 2.5 million people of working age who are dependent on benefits are over the age of 50 (Source: Department for Work and Pensions).

Only 31% of over-50s made redundant succeed in getting a new job within three months, compared with 50% of 25-49 year olds (Source: Labour Market Trends, 2004).

Once unemployed, over-50s are more likely to stay unemployed: 38% of men aged 50 to State Pension Age are unemployed for over 12 months compared to 25% of under-50s (Source: Office for National Statistics, 2004).

2. PRIME launches online newsletter for olderpreneurs

PRIME has launched The Olderpreneur, a group blog or online newsletter aimed primarily at its over 50 clients. But anyone interested in business issues and older enterprise is welcome to read - or contribute to, it. Readers can submit articles and links and also vote on which items receive top billing.

You can try it at www.olderpreneur.net

Partners are welcome to add a news feed from The Olderpreneur to their own web sites. Technical details about how to do this are at the end of this newsletter.

The Olderpreneur covers different territory to the newsletter you are now reading, which is intended for Business Advisers and other working in PRIME partner organisations.

3. PRIME arrives in Yorkshire and Humberside

PRIME is beefing up its presence in Yorkshire and Humberside with the appointment of Jenny Hodson as its first Development Manager for the region. Jenny, who comes from Grimsby, knows the patch well and joins PRIME from the Prince's Trust.

An important part of her job will be to encourage older people who may not be aware of what's on offer to get the most out of existing mainstream services. She will therefore be working closely with enterprise agencies and the four Business Links throughout this very varied region.

Jenny will also be running workshops for over-50s considering self-employment as a way of rejoining the world of work – or remaining in it if they are worried about losing their job. It can be particularly hard for older people to find another employer willing to take them on should they lose their job.

Jenny can be contacted at jennifer.hodson@ace.org.uk

Yorkshire Forward, the regional development agency responsible for Yorkshire and the Humber is providing the funding as part of its Diversity in Enterprise programme.

Almost a third (30% or 226,000 individuals) of those over the age of 50 but below state pension age in the region are classed as economically inactive. Of these 16,200 are claiming Job Seekers Allowance - and a massive 113,900 are on Incapacity Benefits. (Source: Labour Force Survey and DWP - latest figures from www.nomisweb.co.uk).

4. Keeping in contact with PRIME

Many partners will have been rung recently by PRIME to check basic contact and service details. This is part PRIME's efforts to cleanse its database as a prelude to implementing a proper customer relationship management system, which we'll be using to keep better track of clients and partners. We also now need to tell clients more about the organisations we refer them to - what they do, who they can help and whether any fees are involved.

Charging fees does appear to be becoming more common, but is still relatively rare for basic business support.

We also discovered that 18 of PRIME's 130 or so partner organisations seem to have closed down a significant number of local branches or even shut up shop

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altogether. This all reflects recent hard times in the sector as funding streams have dried up or gone elsewhere. Hopefully this period of turmoil is now over.

Meanwhile work is underway on the new CRM system. PRIME has evaluated several over the last year and has decided to go with Salesforce, a system recommended by PRIME-partner Fredericks Foundation, which is already using it.

If your contact or service details have recently altered please contact Karen Anderson – email karen.anderson@ace.org.uk

5, Addressing the self-employed pensions gap: get free booklets for your clients

PRIME has published a free booklet called "Financing an active retirement - a PRIME guide to pensions for the 50+ self-employed". The 32-page guide is being distributed free via libraries and Citizen's Advice Bureaux, and a smaller six-page flyer is being included in mailings by many self-employed organisations and trade federations that have agreed to help.

Partners are welcome to as many copies of the booklet or flyer as they think they can get rid off. Email your requirements to david.sapsed@ace.org.uk You can view the material or download PDFs from www.provideforyourretirement.com

PRIME is concerned that of the 12.5 million self-employed in the United Kingdom, less than half are putting enough money aside to give themselves an adequate income for their retirement years.

"People think that they can retire comfortably by selling their business, but they may be disappointed", says Laurie South, Chief Executive of PRIME. "In our experience as retirement approaches, the owners of many small businesses find that their businesses are not as saleable as they thought. The problem is that they - the owner-operator, often ARE the business, the chief asset. Without them the business is worth little. So instead the self-employed need to bite the bullet and make proper pension arrangements."

6. Older entrepreneur case studies wanted for Enterprise Week

Partly because of the success of the Prince's Trust and the annual publicity surrounding Enterprise Week, there's a strong association in the public's mind between enterprise and youth. But people of all ages set up in business - including a very strong contingent of over 50s.

So for Enterprise Week this year (13th to 18th of November) PRIME is preparing a set of professionally-written case studies about people who have set up in business later in life. These will be sent out to journalists well before the event, which means we need to get started immediately. We're keen to capture the variety, resilience and enthusiasm of older entrepreneurs.

If you have any clients in the PRIME age group you think would welcome the exposure please contact ian.stobie@ace.org.uk We are also hoping to have a live Olderpreneur Showcase event on the 14th of November – we'll email you more details when we have firmed them up. The case studies, which hopefully will have marketing value to both you and your client, will be produced whatever happens.

7. Progress towards re-starting PRIME loan fund

We're currently at an advanced stage in talks with three potential partners. We hope to have a successor fund up and running for new applicants in the next few weeks. We will announce the new scheme immediately to partners once details have been finalised.

PRIME's original small business loan scheme ran for four years until December 2005, when it closed to new borrowers. The new scheme will work on the same general eligibility principles as the old one - a business loan for people aged 50 or over who have been turned down by a conventional bank, who have a viable business plan.

It has taken us so long because we have had to find new sources of both the capital and the guarantee money. But in the process we hope we have also found a better lending formula which promises a genuinely sustainable fund that can help a significantly greater number of people.

In the meantime we have been referring potential borrowers to other business loans offered by our partners and other properly-regulated community organisations.

There's a list on our web site at http://snipurl.com/CDFI_loans

All these schemes are for people who the banks would generally turn down, as was PRIME's. If we've missed yours off please contact ian.stobie@ace.org.uk

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8. Check your web site is linked from PRIME's

PRIME's web site should contain links to all of our partners. We've recently updated them, but please let us know if yours is missing.

Your link should appear in two places. Visitors can find you via the map at http://www.primeinitiative.org.uk/prime_locations.php or from the alphabetical list at <http://snipurl.com/PRIMEpartners>

Please email prime@ace.org.uk with any omissions or corrections.

9. Adding The Olderpreneur news feed to your web site

If you run your own website, you can display the latest headlines or stories from www.olderpreneur.net using RSS. As well as adding free topical content, this will help give your site a more welcoming feel to older people considering setting up in business. So it would be much appreciated if PRIME partners do it.

The best RSS feed to use is

http://www.olderpreneur.net/xml/rss?tags_string=&menu_string=hot which lists the most recent stories that have also proved popular with readers.

How easy it is to make the headlines appear on your site depends a lot on how old it is. Web sites created with modern content management tools often directly support RSS, so you may find you have to do little more than paste the link above into a form.

For older web sites it may be necessary to delve into Javascript, PHP, Perl or whatever it uses and call in the help of professionals. However, even here there are RSS support sites you can go to that will prepare suitable code to display the feed the way you want. An article describing some of the different options for older sites can be found at www.small-business-software.net/display-rss.htm

10. Contact details for people at PRIME

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President: HRH the Prince of Wales. The PRIME Initiative was set up by the Prince of Wales to help older people rejected by the labour market find a way back into work via self-employment or setting up a business. PRIME is a registered charity (Number 261794-2) linked to the national charity Age Concern England.