

SPOTLIGHT ON AIMBIG

Like APM, AimBig has been rewarded with Workforce Australia contracts despite a track record of harm in Disability Employment Services.²⁵

2 out of 5	AimBig score from ratings submitted to the AUWU app by people in employment services
\$49.9 million	Value of current published employment services contracts ²⁶
\$0–100 million	The company does not publish annual reports, but CEO Marcella Romero won a CEO Magazine award in this turnover category ²⁷
\$1.3 million	Value of public funds received by AimBig for the one-year Busy Beans program. There were 205 people in the program in total. ²⁸

AimBig stands out as the only employment services provider to be put under the microscope by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (DRC), which held 3 days of hearings into parent company Arriba Group in February 2022. The hearing focused on the abuse experienced by a participant in the “Busy Beans” program, and how Arriba Group’s corporate structure and employment programs were carefully calibrated to extract maximum profit from people on the AimBig caseload.

The Busy Beans program took advantage of employment services outcome payments, rules that allow providers to employ people on their caseload and refer them to programs in related entities, government wage subsidies, grants and labour hire practices to generate more than \$1 million income to provide unaccredited “training” to 205 people on inappropriate equipment in an unsafe environment.²⁹

Mzia told the royal commission the experience had left her with a “broken heart” and a “broken life”³⁰

Two months after the devastating DRC evidence exposed AimBig’s mistreatment, exploitation and profiteering from disabled people, they were awarded a \$21.7 million Workforce Australia contract.³¹

Visit punishmentforprofit.org for more information and stories about people’s experiences with AimBig.



AimBig bribed me into leaving my DES provider at the time by advertising jobs on SEEK, which I applied for, and then contacting me and claiming I would get the job if I switched over to them as my DES provider. I was reluctant, but I really wanted the job as it was ideal for my skill set and worked well with my disability and circumstances. Once the switch was made I didn’t get the job (or even make it to an interview). Things rapidly declined from there... every 2 weeks they’d ignore or forget my medical needs, then falsely claim I had missed an appointment, and threaten to cancel my payment.

– anonymous contributor 314, Victoria

ENDNOTES

- 1 For examples see: apm.net.au/apm-group/apm-in-australia and busyatwork.com.au/about-busy/what-we-do.
- 2 Morton R, 16 July 2022, 'Albanese offers no relief for jobseekers', *The Saturday Paper*.
- 3 Gerards R and Welters R, 15 June 2021, 'New finding: jobseekers subject to obligations take longer to find work', *The Conversation*.
- 4 Department of Social Services (DSS), 'DSS Demographics – March 2023' [dataset], *DSS Payment Demographic Data*, data.gov.au.
- 5 For more information see the Antipoverty Centre submission to the senate inquiry into poverty: punishmentforprofit.org/submissions/poverty-inquiry.
- 6 For more information see the Antipoverty Centre submission to the housing legislative package inquiry: punishmentforprofit.org/submissions/housing-bill.
- 7 Morgan A (2000) *What is narrative therapy? An easy-to-read introduction*, Dulwich Centre Publications, Adelaide.
- 8 Australia provides one of the earliest examples of large-scale, punitive activation policies following the wave of neoliberalisation that began in wealthy countries in the late 20th century. Struyven L and Steurs G (2004) 'Quasi-market reforms in employment and training services: first experiences and evaluation results', in *Evaluation of systems and programmes: third report on vocational training research in Europe: background report*, (eds) Descy P, Tessaring M, Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, *Cedefop reference series*, 57, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, pp.219–271.
- 9 Gerards and Welters, *New finding: jobseekers subject to obligations take longer to find work*.
- 10 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), 'Workforce Australia and ParentsNext Caseload Time Series – October 2022 to June 2023' [dataset], Workforce Australia Caseload Data, dewr.gov.au; DSS, 'DES Monthly Report - 30 June 2023' [dataset], *DSS Disability Employment Services - monthly profile*, data.gov.au.
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- 12 Johnston P, 8 June 2022, 'Major Centrelink Jobseeker changes coming: Why people are worried', *Yahoo News*.
- 13 DEWR caseload data presented at the Workforce Australia inquiry hearing on 3 November 2022. Access via the [committee website](#); Response to senate estimates question on notice [SQ23-000206](#).
- 14 Morton, *Albanese offers no relief for jobseekers*.
- 15 DEWR, 'TCF Public Data - January 2023 to March 2023' [dataset], *Jobseeker compliance data*, dewr.gov.au.
- 16 DEWR contract data provided to the Workforce Australia inquiry. Access via the [committee website](#).
- 17 DSS, *DES Monthly Report*; DEWR caseload data presented at the Workforce Australia inquiry.
- 18 Antipoverty Centre analysis of senate estimates question on notice [SQ23-000678](#).
- 19 Henriques-Gomes L, 22 July 2022, 'Jobseeker asked to choose between work and job agency appointments under Workforce Australia system', *Guardian Australia*.
- 20 Taylor D, 8 September 2021, 'Australian job seekers are dropping out of the market, but it's not because they don't want to work', *ABC News*.

- 21 Access the report on the inquiry page: *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve*.
- 22 Access the report on the inquiry page: *Your Future Planning*.
- 23 For examples see punishmentforprofit.org/story/media-spotlight and reports from the 2019 parliamentary inquiry into employment services and inquiry reports *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve* and the *Social Security Legislation Amendment (Streamlined Participation Requirements and Other Measures) Bill 2021 [Provisions]*.
- 24 DEWR caseload data presented at the Workforce Australia inquiry; Question on notice SQ23-000206.
- 25 Two months after AimBig's appearance at the Disability Royal Commission the government announced new contracts that saw them enter the mainstream employment services market for the first time. See: disability.royalcommission.gov.au/public-hearings/public-hearing-21 and tenders.employment.gov.au.
- 26 AimBig published contract values from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (source: tenders.gov.au) and the Department of Social Services (source: dss.gov.au/overview/departamental-contract-listing/grants-contracts). Workforce Australia: \$21.7 million; Disability Employment Services: \$28.2 million; Total: \$49.9 million.
- 27 CEO Magazine, 24 February 2022, *'Arriba Group's Marcella Romero named CEO of the Year – A\$0-100m turnover'*.
- 28 Henrique-Gomes, *New job led to 'broken life'*.
- 29 Edmonds C, 26 February 2022, 'Disability employment services program left woman 'unfit for work', royal commission told', *ABC News*; Henrique-Gomes L, 23 February 2022, 'Disability services company pocketed nearly \$1m for barista course lacking basic equipment, inquiry hears', *The Guardian*; Henrique-Gomes L, 24 February 2022, 'Barista course lacking basic equipment set up with \$300,000 federal grant, disability inquiry hears', *The Guardian*.
- 30 Henrique-Gomes L, 27 February 2022, 'New job led to 'broken life' under disability scheme spruiked as success story', *The Guardian*.
- 31 See: tenders.employment.gov.au
- 32 Salvos FY22 annual report, salvationarmy.org.au.
- 33 Diniejko A, 11 April 2013, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Salvation Army in Victorian England', *Victorian Web*.
- 34 Henrique-Gomes L, 15 July 2022, 'Jobseeker forced to travel 60km to keep payments under new welfare program', *The Guardian*.
- 35 Antipoverty Centre analysis of senate estimates question on notice SQ23-000678.
- 36 Antipoverty Centre analysis of information published in the Salvos annual report, retail award wage rates, the number of standard number of Work for the Dole hours and placement duration per participant, and senate estimates question on notice SQ22-000073.
- 37 Salvos FY22 annual report, p65, salvationarmy.org.au.
- 38 Salvos Employment Plus published contract values from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (source: tenders.gov.au) and the Department of Social Services (source: dss.gov.au/overview/departamental-contract-listing/grants-contracts). Workforce Australia: \$190.8 million; Employability Skills Training: \$6.1 million; Disability Employment Services: \$9.3 million; ParentsNext: \$5.6 million; Total: \$211.8 million
- 39 Salvos FY22 annual report, p64, salvationarmy.org.au.
- 40 Salvos FY22 annual report, p13, salvationarmy.org.au; Antipoverty Centre analysis of senate estimates question on notice SQ22-000073.
- 41 APM FY22 annual report, p9, p48, p49, p50, p67, p68, p70, apminvestors.net.au.

- 42 Department of Social Services Freedom of Information Request 2021-M001, dss.gov.au.
- 43 Morton R, 29 August 2020, 'Exclusive: Jobactive virus kickbacks top \$500 million', *The Saturday Paper*.
- 44 ACOSS Workforce Australia Provider snapshot, acoss.org.au/workforce-australia-provider-snapshot.
- 45 Antipoverty Centre analysis of DEWR and DSS contracts and grants data.
- 46 AEC Transparency Register, transparency.aec.gov.au/Download, Figures are the total donations identified in the Donations Made and Detailed Receipts datasets published by the Australian Electoral Commission. The first donation identified is from 2011. Entities included in these figures were listed in AEC records as Advanced Personnel Management, APM and APM Human Services International Ltd.
- 47 APM published contract values from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (source: tenders.gov.au) and the Department of Social Services (source: dss.gov.au/overview/departmental-contract-listing/grants-contracts). Workforce Australia: \$334.9 million; Employability Skills Training: \$66.9 million; Self Employment Assistance: \$ 58.9 million; Disability Employment Services: \$264 million; ParentsNext: \$6.9 million; Transition to Work: \$50 million; Career Transition Assistance: \$5.5 million; Total: \$787 million.
- 48 APM FY22 annual report, p49 and p47, apminvestors.net.au.
- 49 APM FY22 annual report, p88, apminvestors.net.au.
- 50 Bahr J, 29 January 2023, 'TJ called an employment service provider for advice. They say an agent made jokes about suicide', *SBS News*.
- 51 Henrique-Gomes L, 27 July 2022, 'Workforce Australia job agencies rake in millions more from training contracts', *The Guardian*.
- 52 O'Halloran D, 4 September 2020, 'Australian unemployed workers' experiences of being parked and creamed by employment providers', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*.
- 53 See National Employment Services Association the [submission](#) to the *Social Security Legislation Amendment (Streamlined Participation Requirements and Other Measures) Bill 2021 [Provisions]* inquiry
- 54 ACOSS statement to Jobs and Skills Summit, 2 September 2022.
- 55 See: [instagram.com/sarinarussoglobal](https://www.instagram.com/sarinarussoglobal), twitter.com/SarinaRusso and [linkedin.com/in/sarinarusso](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarinarusso)
- 56 di Stefano M, 15 January 2017, 'The Instagram "Job Queen" Has Insane Selfie Access To Government Ministers', *Buzzfeed News*; di Stefano M, 18 January 2017, 'Instagram "Job Queen's" Business Boomed After \$600m Government Contract', *Buzzfeed News*; Pike B, 28 June 2015, 'Sarina Russo Job Access opens offices in Western Sydney including Struggle Street area of Mt Druitt', *The Daily Telegraph*; Hunter F, 10 January 2017, 'Sussan Ley travel scandal: Who is job queen Sarina Russo?', *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Margan M, 22 August 2018, 'Peter Dutton's very modern family', *The Daily Mail*
- 57 See: twitter.com/JeremyPoxon/status/1580773793626488832.
- 58 AEC Transparency Register, transparency.aec.gov.au/Download. Figures are the total donations identified in the Donations Made and Detailed Receipts datasets published by the AEC. The first donation identified is from 1999. Entities included in these figures were listed in AEC records as: The Office Business Academy Pty Ltd (T/a Russo Inst of Tech, Sarina Russo Job Access (Australia) Pty Ltd, The Office Business Academy Pty Ltd, Sarina Russo Job Access, Sarino Russo, Sarino Russo Job Access, Sarina Rosso Job Access, Sarina Russo Job Access (Aust) Pty Ltd, Sarina Russo job Access Pty Ltd, Sarina Russo Group, Sarina Investments Pty Ltd, Sarina Russo Group of Companies, Sarina Russo and Sarina Russo Job Access (Australia) Pty. Ltd.

- 59 Published contract values from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (source: tenders.gov.au) and the Department of Social Services (source: dss.gov.au/overview/departamental-contract-listing/grants-contracts). Workforce Australia: \$76.7 million; Employability Skills Training: \$36.2 million; Self Employment Assistance: \$36.8 million; Disability Employment Services: \$11.9 million; ParentsNext: \$4 million; Career Transition Assistance: \$2.9 million; Australian Apprenticeship Support Network: \$84 million; Total: \$252.7 million. Concluded contract values from the same sources total \$816.7 million. Total: \$1.07 billion.
- 60 Sprague J, 8 August 2022, 'She failed high school English. Now she's worth \$267m', *Australian Financial Review*.
- 61 Patricia Karvelas (presenter), 10 May 2023, 'PM: The Budget 'supports Australians across the board' [radio interview], *RN Breakfast*, ABC Radio National.

