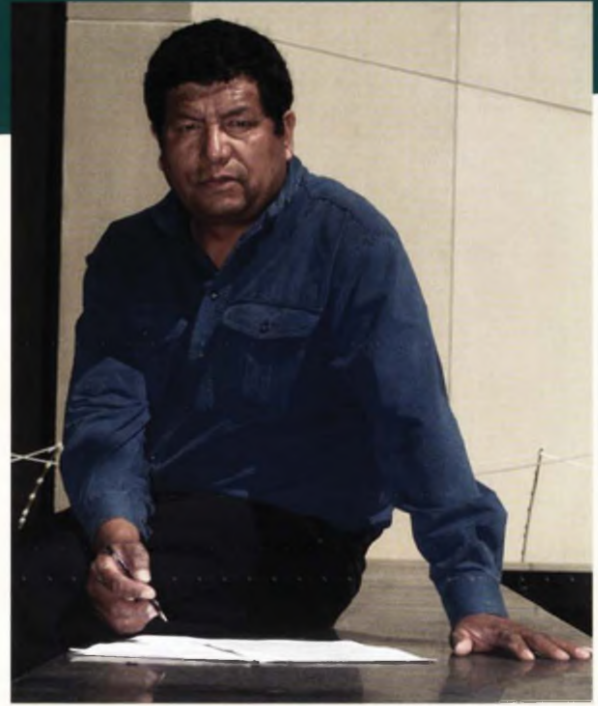


Dionisio Camacho is someone who believes strongly in creating a fair and just world and providing others with opportunities that will make their lives better. To achieve these goals Dionisio has always displayed courage.

Speaking Out



In 1988, Dionisio arrived in Australia from Peru, with no English and no information on where to find support so he could begin rebuilding his life.

Twelve years later he was invited to meet the House of Representatives Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations to share the difficulties he faced as a middle-aged migrant seeking work and his understanding of what other unemployed immigrants have experienced. Dionisio had highlighted his experiences in a paper that he sent to the inquiry into Mature-age Workers.

Dionisio worked as an accountant in Peru and lecturer in economics and social sciences at the University of Mexico. However, he discovered when he arrived in Brisbane that his skills and qualifications from Latin America were not recognised in Australia.

Not one to give up, Dionisio enrolled in English classes at a TAFE college and after two years was accepted into his masters in Social Planning and Development at the University of Queensland, which he completed in 1993. He is currently researching for his doctorate at the University of Canberra on the subject: 'Immigrants accessing Labour Market programs'.

Following his masters, Dionisio was accepted as a trainee at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Planning and has since worked as a migrant liaison officer and more recently as a project officer with the Department of Family and Community Services.

'I wanted the Committee to hear another perspective'

"In Australia there are many opportunities to improve yourself if you try," Dionisio explained. "But sometimes you need some help in knowing where to go for the right advice and even how to write a job application. Whatever I have learnt, I have always tried to share with others, especially those who have been in a similar situation.

"Being a migrant officer at the CES was really valuable, because I saw first hand the problems that people from other cultures and countries faced. There are so many barriers to overcome and the problems that migrants face in trying to integrate are so great.

"Many migrants are afraid to go to government agencies in order to ask for things, especially if they have fled a country where the government has been the problem. It does take courage for migrants to seek support from the government when often they are afraid of the government.

"I wanted to explain to our legislators and the people who develop our policies that it is not easy," Dionisio added. "When I saw the ad in the paper for the Mature-age Workers inquiry I saw an opportunity to speak out about a few things and make people aware of what is really happening.

"What I have done is not a big thing and I know my paper will not be a major feature of the final report, but I wanted the politicians and the Committee to hear another perspective, especially from a migrant."

The Mature-age Workers inquiry has received more than 200 submissions. Almost half of those have come from individuals who have had something to say on the issue, often based on personal experiences.

Not all parliamentary committee investigations attract the same level of interest from the community. For many individuals the formality of committee processes can at times act as a disincentive to participation.

Understanding this, parliamentary committees have begun to use less formal methods for gathering their information. As part of its Mature-age Workers inquiry, the House Employment Committee held a recent round table that allowed participants to debate their views around the table. Round table formats and choice of location are among the considerations of the committee in trying to make the process less daunting for individuals.

"It wasn't easy fronting the House Employment Committee even though I knew about the topic I was speaking on," Dionisio said. "I was really nervous at first, but I could see the Committee members were interested in what I was saying and the questions they were asking me were friendly. I certainly did not feel as if I was being interrogated!"

Dionisio Comacho's paper that he sent to the Mature-age Workers inquiry and the transcript from the hearing are both available from the House Employment Committee's web site: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/eewr/OWK/index.htm