

# Dole queues jump

## ECONOMY

Suzanne Robson

THE economic crisis has hit the community of Yarra hard with unemployment skyrocketing and employer confidence wavering.

Figures from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations show a 15.6 per cent increase in the number of dole recipients living in Yarra during January.

The number of jobseekers looking for work via Fitzroy job agency Sarina Russo has also increased markedly since last December.

Sarina Russo Fitzroy manager Alex Todorovski said there had been a rise in the number of job seekers and clients referred from Centrelink.

“The number of employers taking on casual, part-time and full-time positions have decreased,” he said. “In my opinion it is a few things. Business confidence and employee confidence plays a big part.”

His clients included former white-collar, blue-collar, IT and hospitality and textiles workers.

Many of those made redundant were choosing to upskill via a Federal Government training and skills program.

“There has been a large increase in targeted training over the past 12 months through the Productivity Places Program,” he said. Sarina Russo is one of four agencies in Yarra registered with the Federal Government’s Job Network, whose clients are referred to from Centrelink.

JobWatch Inc executive director Zana Bytheway said their database showed there had been an 88 per cent increase in redundancies across Victoria for the first two months of this year compared to the same time last year.

Ms Bytheway said that from last July to December, there had been a 35 per cent increase and a

marked sharp incline in the first two months of this year.

JobWatch, a not-for-profit legal rights legal centre, receives 22,000 calls a year from Victorian workers. “There is no question about it, people are being sacked, redundancies, jobs no longer required,” she said.

“It is not a myth.”

About 28 per cent of inquiries about termination to JobWatch’s telephone information service in 2008 were from Yarra residents.

Ms Bytheway said their database indicated that older workers aged 45-59 and women were experiencing more redundancies.

“Our database shows that the older workers are very exposed during an economic downturn,” she said.

Some employers were also using the economic downturn to shed staff they did not need.