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# Bid to meet employment challenges

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**Clutha Mayor Bryan Cadogan and programme co-ordinator Ruth Ratcliffe in Milton yesterday during talks with employers subscribing to the newly launched Mayors' Task Force for Jobs Community Recovery Programme in Otago. PHOTO: RICHARD DAVISON**

Rural districts in the South are about to get a shot in the arm for jobseekers, and their prospective employers.

Clutha will be among the first to benefit from a \$12.5million Ministry of Social Development-funded programme to help rural councils across New Zealand address post-lockdown employment challenges.

Other district councils in the South set to receive \$500,000 from the Mayors' Task Force for Jobs Community Recovery Programme include Gore, Waimate, Westland, Grey and Mackenzie.

Mayor Bryan Cadogan said he was delighted Clutha was among those chosen to be "part of the solution" for the current economic challenges facing the country.

He believed the council had been selected thanks to its long-standing experience running similar schemes successfully matching jobseekers to employers.

"I'm describing this as a bit like [youth employment initiative] Ready, Steady, Work on steroids," he said.

"Initially, we're planning two job speed-dating nights, one in Balclutha and a second in Queenstown, to see what the region's employers can do to help address the looming humanitarian crisis that's been caused there by Covid-19."

The council had hired former Clutha youth counsellor Ruth Ratcliffe as programme co-ordinator.

"Ruth and I are only on our fourth day of a road trip round Clutha employers before we head further afield, and already we've been heartened by the response, affirming the strength of Clutha's economy."

Clutha remained in job surplus, despite the recent lockdown, he said.

That contrasted sharply with Queenstown, where an estimated 9000 additional people were seeking work due to the downturn in the tourist industry.

Ms Ratcliffe said although the initial aim of the programme was to match "faces to places", her role would evolve as it progressed.

"It's a time-critical situation, and we want to see some immediate beneficial outcomes both for jobseekers and for employers who may have been struggling to fill roles previously.

"Right now, it's about informing and on-boarding people, but there could also be a pastoral element down the track, ensuring things are working out as planned."

Discretionary funding was available for programme participants, and could be used to support both jobseekers and employers.

Although it had a ministry target of creating 50 "sustainable employment positions", Clutha was aiming high, she said.

"We want to see at least 100, maybe more."

A date for the initial Balclutha event was yet to be confirmed, but she hoped it would take place in early October.

The Queenstown event is scheduled for October 10 at the town's Memorial Hall, and will involve councils and employers from across Otago.

Fonterra site manager Morgan Watt, whose Stirling cheese factory employs about 100 staff, gave the new scheme his backing.

"Part of the Fonterra strategy is 'Good Together', and this initiative sits squarely within that.

"There are always jobs available here and within Fonterra more widely, so we'll be fully supporting the programme with a presence at upcoming events."

Ms Ratcliffe said other businesses wishing to find out more could contact her through the Clutha District Council, on (03) 419-0200.