



Employment consultations with young people in Western and South Western Sydney

Commissioned by Jesuit Social Services

2023



Acknowledgment of Country

Youth Action acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We understand that sovereignty was never ceded and recognise their continuing connection to lands, languages, waters, and cultures.

Our office is located upon the land of the Gadigal people. We recognise their traditional and ongoing Custodianship, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.



About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and the services that support them in NSW. We work towards a society where all NSW young people are supported, engaged, valued, and have their rights realised. We represent over 150 Member organisations and regularly engage with young people and youth workers from all over the state, as we have for over 30 years.

We give a particular focus to young people who are regional, First Nations, LGBTIQ+, with disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including migrants and refugees, and doing it tough. We use a rights-based lens to focus on programs, policy and advocacy that achieve meaningful outcomes, embed strengths-based approaches, and are informed by data and evidence. We are an ally to the self-determination of First Nations communities, are led by the expertise of young people and the Sector, and work to be a trust-worthy partner and collaborator.

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About Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. We 'do' and we 'influence'. We accompany people and communities to foster and regenerate the web of relationships that sustain us all – across people, place and planet; and we work to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion. The work of Jesuit Social Services is informed by Catholic Social Teaching and our Jesuit tradition of respecting the preciousness of each human being, walking with the disregarded, and caring for the earth.

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Background

In August 2022, Jesuit Social Services (JSS) commissioned Youth Action to undertake a series of consultations with young people 15 to 24 years of age in Western and South Western Sydney. The aim was to capture their ideas, views, and experiences of employment to inform JSS programs, policies, and decisions about their provision of employment and unemployment support to young people in these areas.

Consultations were arranged through Youth Action and Jesuit Social Services networks of organisations providing employment, education, or vocational services to young people. A particular focus was given to organisations working with young people from socially excluded groups such as First Nations, LGBTIQ+, with disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including migrants and refugees, and those doing it tough to ensure their experiences were included.

Youth Action heard back from 81 young people across 8 sites. This report summarises the themes and recommendations identified through these consultations.

Demographic data below is from those groups where we could collect it.

- 30% of participants were between 12 to 15 years of age
- 13% of participants were between 16 to 17 years of age
- 34% of participants were between 18 to 24 years of age
- 34% of participants identified as female
- 56% of participants identified as male
- 9% of participants identified as other gender

- 13% of participants identified as First Nations
- 4% of participants identified as LGBTIQ+
- 30% of participants identified as a person with disability
- 17% of participants identified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
- 4% of participants identified as doing it tough

The following list contains all consultations and their respective abbreviations used throughout this summary:

- TAFE NSW Campbelltown Campus: Cert IV & Diploma students, Campbelltown (SWS)
- Verona School for Specific Purposes (Verona SSP): NSW Department of Education school for students, experiencing behavioural difficulties impact on their learning, Fairfield (SWS)
- Syd West Multicultural Services (BELA): Blacktown Emerging Leaders and Advocates Program for newly arrived refugee and migrant young people, Blacktown (WS)
- Camden Council Julia Reserve Youth Hub (Julia Reserve): youth drop-in service, Oran Park (SWS)
- Whitelion NSW: youth employment program, Mt Druitt (WS)
- Ted Noffs Foundation Street University (Street University): non-residential drug and alcohol treatment program providing opportunities for young people experiencing disadvantage, Penrith (WS)
- Ambervale High School: student leadership group, Ambervale (SWS)
- Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA): careers expo event, attendees from Punchbowl Boys HS, Belmore Boys HS, Miller Technical HS, and Bankstown Senior College (SWS & WS)

Youth Action also completed state-wide consultations with young people in 2021. We heard from 44 young people in Western and South Western Sydney during those consultations. Where relevant, we have included feedback from those young people in this report as well.

Education, vocational training, & youth employment programs

Young people spoke at length about the important role that schools, vocational education institutions, and youth programs play in supporting young people to prepare for employment. They said that young people connected to these organisations were much more likely to feel that they had a level of skills and qualifications in relation to the jobs they wanted to apply for, which in turn made them feel more confident about seeking employment.

“Young people need a level of confidence to even apply for jobs” - student, Verona SSP

Young people said that these services taught them important skills such as resume writing, how to write a job application, and interviews skills, as well as learning about the diversity of employment and career opportunities available to them.

“This course was best thing that happened to me” - program participant, Whitelion

Many organisations offered programs to engage young people in a variety of pre-employment courses such as foundational skills, and school-based short TAFE courses in skill or industries areas. Young people with additional needs

such as those with disability, newly arrived refugee or migrants, or those doing it tough said access to these kinds of courses through trusted organisations who could offer extra support to them was a key factor in their decision to enrol.

“There are different types of learning, flexible learning, gives young people a feeling like they have a sense of control” – young person, Julia Reserve

Several young people in youth employment programs talked about previous poor experiences in mainstream learning or training institutions and remarked on the difference for them coming into a service that understood them and their backgrounds and was able to provide individualised support to them.

“After a negative experience in my last course, I lost confidence to study again” – program participant, Whitelion

“My job provider wants me to be happy, they don’t want anything in return just effort”- program participant, Whitelion

Young people talked very positively about school or youth service partnerships with TAFE to allow them to complete fee-free vocational training or undertake work experience that are requirements for many jobs.

“Work experience at school helps apply for jobs” - young person, BELA

Young people in schools spoke about how important they felt it was to be able to complete courses, traineeships and apprenticeships while still at school.

“Things like hair and beauty, cooking and baking courses in schools or school-based apprenticeships” – student Ambervale HS

They felt these courses were useful in keeping young people engaged in school as well as helping them work out what they might like to do after finishing.

“School based short TAFE courses in a variety of skill areas or industries to find out what you like” – program participant, Street University

Students also recognised the opportunity provided by these in-school programs to obtain qualifications required by many of the jobs they were seeking such as barista certificate, white card, or first aid.

“We need more training and obtaining certificate opportunities in schools” - student, Lebanese Muslim Association careers expo

All spoke about the need for these courses and certificates to be fee-free to be accessible to young people from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. Many of the young people we spoke with came from low-income backgrounds and were often supporting themselves and their families, they said that fees were a deterrent that often prevented them from being able to enrol in training.

Youth Action’s previous [Employment Consultations Report](#) found that young people not connected to learning institutions or youth programs found it very hard to find out about how to access work readiness support or programs. Many expressed significant concern about falling behind without developing the skills taught by these programs. They said young people are especially vulnerable during periods of transition such as leaving school or university, changing jobs, or becoming unemployed as they may not be connected to trusted organisations who could help them.

Challenges for young people in engaging in education, vocational training, & youth employment programs

Young people identified a number of challenges and gaps in education, vocational training, and employment programs that they thought could be addressed to help themselves, and their peers to achieve better employment outcomes.

Poor experiences in school were a common theme that all consultation groups spoke about. School was often the first place where young people learnt about employment and career options so they all thought it was important that these experiences are positive and supportive to set young people up well for the future. Several young people spoke about difficulties that some mainstream schools have in catering for different learning styles or supporting students who may be struggling. This has become even more of an issue following the disruptions to education caused by the pandemic.

Youth Action has heard through our other consultations with young people and youth services that disengagement from school has become a significant problem. Remote learning was difficult for many young people. Some did not have access to technology to complete their work, while others struggled without face-to-face teacher support. Increased mental health issues exacerbated during the pandemic also made learning and staying engaged in school hard. Some young people did not return to school.

“Some schools fail to acknowledge student situations, barriers, should provide support to students” – young person, Julia Reserve

School and study stress was another area of concern for young people. Young people talked a lot about the impact that this pressure has on their mental health and wellbeing. They felt there needs to be more support available to help young people develop strategies to manage this stress.

Those undertaking the HSC spoke about the pressure they experienced from both school and family.

“The way they carry on about HSC is a lot ... it builds students up to do well or life will be negative. It add a lot of pressure, makes it stressful” – young person, BELA

Students from newly arrived refugee and migrant communities said that this stress was exacerbated by language difficulties.

“HSC exam questions ... if you can't understand one word, you don't get support” – young person, BELA

Several students said they felt schools placed too much emphasis on university and that there needed to be more opportunities for students to experience the diversity of career options available. Students at TAFE said they did not think vocation education was promoted as well as it could be and they had been surprised when they realised the range of courses and training that TAFE offers.

“The expectation or assumption that students are going to university. That path isn’t for everyone. You don’t need to go to uni to be successful. Other paths should be explored more” – student, Campbelltown TAFE

Career Advice

Access to reliable, up to date career advice was something that everyone thought was critical for young people to be able to achieve their careers goals. Young people said careers advisors in schools were really important as they were the first point of contact for students to find out what employment or further study they are interested in.

“Career advisors are helpful in finding out what you like and what you want to do – if you don’t want to be at school, they put in every effort to explore things like TAFE, apprenticeships, or study” – young person, Julia Reserve

Young people highlighted the need for careers advisors to be able to build links between students and business/industry. Many young people we heard from said they got their first jobs through people they knew such as family members and personal contacts. Young people with limited experience or connections felt they were at a disadvantage so relied on contacts through learning institutions or youth services.

“We need better informed careers advisors at schools with industry connections” – student, Campbelltown TAFE

Young people wanted to know more about growth industries and opportunities for employment within Western Sydney. They thought students should be connected to these opportunities whilst in high school to help them

commence career journeys earlier. These included large infrastructure projects in the region as well as technology and creative arts precincts.

Lastly, young people said they would like to receive more advice at the end of school about career options beyond university. They felt the education system places too much pressure on young people to believe they need to go to university rather than looking at what else was available.

“There’s lots of opportunities for people when they finish school especially if they don’t have the marks. There are other university pathways working for young people, who didn’t get the marks they want ... There’s an expectation or assumption that students are going to university. That path isn’t for everyone. You don’t need to go to uni to be successful. Other paths should be explored more.” – young person, BELA

Young people outside the school system spoke about how important it is for there to be access to career advice through tertiary institutions, youth services, and other specialist youth employment providers. Young people who were not supported by trusted adults said they felt more uncertainty about career options and less confident to apply for jobs.

“TAFE teachers have given us lots of resources in how to move into careers, job availability, know what websites to look for employment” – student, Campbelltown TAFE

“My youth worker was helpful, she had conversations with me around midwifery ... she shared her experiences on studying” – young person, Julia Reserve

Securing and maintaining employment

Specialist Youth Employment Support

All young people spoke about how overwhelming it can be to apply for jobs. They agreed that young people could benefit from more support to navigate the full spectrum of employment from deciding upon career pathways, looking for work, through to maintaining employment.

“The process of getting a job is a long wait time, 2-3 weeks for someone to respond to applications” – program participant, Street University

“You apply for lots of jobs but hear nothing” – student, Ambervale HS

There were many different elements of the process they wanted help with however knowing how to write a resume and complete an application was one of the first things. Many said they used the internet to find out how to write a resume and search for jobs but would have liked someone to help them do it, so they knew it was right.

“(There are) social barriers to applying for a job, usually the first time talking to people can be scary, if you don't know how to manage anxiety and it feels new to them, I feel like I can't do it” – young person, Julia Reserve.

Many job applications are online which young people with limited experience or skills felt was much harder as they did not think they looked good to employers on paper. Some thought they were better at verbal than written

communication skills and wished they could be given the chance to apply or interview in person.

“There are a lot of online applications some with QR codes lead to job application ... Applying in person is better though.... When apply in person it's like a mini-interview, the employer gets first impression of you. If everything is online, it's a form that's it.” program participant, Street University.

Young people talked about the importance of having consistent support from people who understood the experiences of young people and who had capacity to get to know their individual circumstances.

“My job provider worker changed a lot, and it stressed me out” – program participant, Whitelion

Those who had youth workers, teachers, family members, or other trusted adults to help them stay motivated said they found the experience much less disheartening. This was particularly true for young people who experienced multiple challenges such as juggling employment with mental health issues, those with disability, those with poor previous experiences of education and employment, or young people experiencing barriers to employment due to discrimination.

Young people described feeling especially vulnerable during periods of transition such as after leaving school or university, changing jobs or periods of unemployment. They were less likely to be connected to teachers and advisors in learning institutions who could help them make decisions about what to do next.

Employment Experience

Young people identified the need for there to be more access to work experience opportunities. Many said even entry level jobs had prior experience requirements which was difficult for young people to meet if they had limited employment experience.

“High end jobs require more training and experience ... sometimes they have unrealistic expectations for experience according to (a young person’s) age” – young person, Street University

Young people felt trapped by this situation, especially when trying to get their first job and felt employers had unrealistic expectations about what experience a young person applying for an entry level job might have.

“I could do those things the employer is asking for if you give me experience in the job ...You can’t have that experience without learning from the job” – young person, Street University

“There can be a mismatch of skills YP have and what the employer requires” – student, Verona SSP

One solution young people saw was being able to utilise opportunities available to them through existing youth programs to develop valuable, transferable work skills.

“You can get experience through volunteering, doing things after school, or being helpful at school” – young person, Julia Reserve

They also believed life experiences could be translated into employment qualities that employers are seeking.

“Give young people a chance or give them opportunities ... I want to be a leader so kids like me get a chance to succeed” – program participant, Whitelion

Combining work and study

The other area young people spoke at length about was the stress many feel trying to juggle work and study commitments. Cost of living pressures resulting from the pandemic were raised as a significant contributing factor to young people needing to manage both. Young people often needed to support themselves financially either partially or fully as family incomes were stretched.

“I am studying HSC and working 43 hours per week due to responsibilities I have to support my family” - young person, BELA

They acknowledged the benefits of early employment experiences for both employment prospects and development of independent living skills. However, trying to fit work and study had an impact on young people’s quality of life and increased their stress levels.

“It’s hard to find a job, people only want full time workers, they can’t work around school timetables” – student, Ambervale HS

“With school and commitments I only get one day off a week to work” - young person, Julia Reserve

Casualisation of employment available to young people

One issue of concern that we heard from young people was the precarious nature of the jobs available to them. Many said the roles they were looking at were in industries that rely heavily on casual or contract staff such as hospitality, retail, construction, or arts and recreation. Youth Action's 2022 ["Bearing the Brunt" Report](#) (p11) found 54% of young people in 2019 were employed in casual or gig economy jobs.

Whilst the flexibility of casual employment suited some young people who were combining study and work, most young people we heard from said this situation made them feel financially vulnerable to circumstances outside their control such as the pandemic, economic downturns, or just at the whim of their employers. Their hours and weekly income were irregular and frequently not sustainable.

"Young people are given the shit jobs .. you start with a few shifts and only get more if you are good" – student, Verona SSP

Young people who lived independently were often employed in multiple casual jobs to make ends meet. Young people in the ["Bearing the Brunt" consultations](#) described the stress they felt from this situation, comparing it to being on call 24 hours a day. Young people in these consultations expressed their reluctance to say no to shifts or calling in sick as well as fear of losing upcoming shifts or being treated unfairly.

“If you say no to shifts then they (the employer) cuts shifts... There’s a negative perception of young people if they can’t do a shift” – young person, BELA

“I feel bad calling in sick, I get scared I will lose my job and I feel bad because my employer relies on me” – student, Verona SSP

Young people and workplace rights

Workplace rights was an area young people thought requires more attention. They suggested there needs to be education for both young people and employers. They felt young people are vulnerable to exploitation because of their lack of knowledge in relation to their rights and where to seek advice. They raised concerns about having to work above their rostered hours or working unpaid overtime and some felt they were not treated the same as their adult colleagues due to their age.

“Young people are exploited by the big companies ... I have friends who work at a large fast food company and they are working overtime unpaid because they are young ... it happens often ... everyone has to stay back” – student, Ambervale HS

They believe employers need education about how to support young employees, particularly those with additional needs.

“It’s tough to find jobs these days having a disability, if you get the job the bosses take advantage of you because of who you are. I have trust issues around bosses now” – program participant, Whitelion

“I have been through many jobs where there was a lot of pressure with my manager picking on me because of my disability” – student, Verona SSP

Young people with a disability face further challenges in the workforce. Young people said they did not feel comfortable sharing if they had additional needs and worried about the negative impacts this may have on their employment.

“No, I wouldn’t tell them. I am scared I would scare them off and they wouldn’t hire me” – student, Verona SSP

Other young people who described more positive experiences within their workplaces, said they would feel comfortable telling their employer about their additional needs because they felt it allowed the employer to offer the right support.

“If they don’t know they can’t help me ... it’s definitely much further ahead than 20 years ago, educating people about additional needs” – student, Verona SSP

Positive workplace environments for young people

We identified the following list of factors from what young people told us that contribute to a positive and supportive workplace:

- Employers having an awareness and understanding that young people’s employment experiences are different from adults.
- Scaffolded learning approach towards acquiring new skills.
- Easily accessible workplace right guides for young people

- A relational workplace culture where young people feel heard, understood, and connected.
- Young people made to felt they are valued employees contributing to a workplace.
- A workplace that promotes a safe culture where employees feel comfortable notifying their employer if they are unable to work due to illness or to accept a shift.

"I want a safe space type of work. A place that knows if I'm stressed or anxious, they will give me a moment to calm down and walk away until I'm feeling better. I just want to feel like I'm accepted for who I am". - program participant, Whitelion

Young People from Socially Excluded Groups

A number of the young people we heard from came from socially excluded groups such as young people from culturally diverse communities, young people with disability, and young people doing it tough. These young people described unique, often systemic, challenges in relation to employment that they felt required specific attention. It was clear through our discussions with young people that when strategies were put in place to address these challenges, young people from these groups were able to successfully move past these barriers to achieve their employment and career goals.

Young people from culturally diverse communities

Young people from recently arrived refugee and migrant backgrounds said language was often their first hurdle.

“Learning a new language is barrier to getting work, the English course was tough, I had to do extra hours to help with understanding” – young person, BELA

They felt young people in these circumstances could benefit from specialist support in relation to the language used in the vocational education and employment contexts as this was often different to what they had learnt their initial English lessons.

“The online application was tricky, friend to help me ... I felt like coming from different background” – young person, BELA

“IEC (Intensive English Centres) is good at school, it helps you prepares for classes, without it young people won't get basics ... but the transition from IEC to Uni or TAFE is very hard” – young person, BELA

Young people and youth services also identified that study support would be beneficial during the transition from Intensive English Centres. SydWest Multicultural Services said they frequently receive enquiries from young people who are studying subjects for the first time and unable to afford private tutoring.

“Transition from the Intensive English Centre into mainstream high school is challenging because not enough support and don't have people they can relate to” – young person, BELA

Another area this group of young people spoke a lot about was the area of family responsibilities and settlement experience pressures. Newly arrived young people spoke about how they frequently took on majority of responsibility of navigating settlement processes for their family such as translation, completing paperwork, and supporting their families to settle into their new environment.

Some young people said they had to postpone their desire to study or start a career because of caring responsibilities or find a job to contribute financially. In some cases young people were the sole bread winner for the family.

“We have a cultural expectation to support our family, a job is main way to support family” – young person, BELA

“Young women often have more cultural responsibilities in household than males” – young person, BELA

Visa status for newly arrived young people was another complicating factor. Young people on Bridging Visas said they do not allow access to any financial support including HECS for two years.

“Young people want to study but they don't have HECS and they must also support family by working” – young person, BELA

This made tertiary education inaccessible for them unless they were fortunate enough to secure a scholarship.

“Uni Scholarships important because visa status prevents access to HECS. There needs to be more promotion of scholarships ... through high schools and TAFE, and to first year university students” – young person, BELA

Lastly, young people described experiences where they felt employers discriminated against them due to their cultural identity.

“I prepared for an interview at one of the fast food places. I was asked about cultural background, after I told them I never got contacted again” – young person, BELA

“There is a huge language barrier there... our accent is a big issue in the workplace, some people they don't even understand what we are saying” – young person, BELA.

They suggested it would be helpful to have more education in workplaces about how to support young workers from culturally diverse communities, especially in relation to the settlement experiences of newly arrived refugee and migrant young people.

Young people with disability

Young people with disability spoke at length about their experiences and how they thought employment outcomes could be improved for young people like them. Young people self-identified a range of different disabilities including mental health issues, neurodiverse conditions, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties, and physical disabilities. Despite this diversity they agreed that the most important thing was having individualised support from specialist workers who understood their context as young people with

disability as well as having knowledge about the educational, vocational, and employment sector.

Young people said they benefitted greatly from was being able to access specialist employment courses through school, TAFE, and youth services. Young people said the TAFE Disability consultants were a valuable source of career advice about what courses or careers might suits their needs. While young people at Verona SSP talked about how helpful they found the range of courses the school offered such as a work readiness program, barista training, canteen work to learn money handling and customer service skills, and leadership programs.

Young people liked that these courses were for young people with additional needs as the teachers understood how to offer individualised support to ensure participants did not get left behind in their learning.

“This course (employment program) has been helpful because of the extra support, other people have the same type of difficulties as me and needs” – student, Verona SSP

Some of these courses were run in collaboration with local disability agencies which helped broaden student’s networks outside the school environment as well.

One challenge that teachers at Verona SSP described experiencing was extra administrative requirements to enrol young people with additional needs in mainstream courses. This was why the school had focused on offering many courses in-house. Young people shared their experiences of not being considered for courses by mainstream learning institutions because of their

additional needs. Students said they thought there was an opportunity to better utilise NDIS support workers, which many students were eligible for, to encourage learning institutions accept them in mainstream courses with support from these workers.

Another important area that these young people spoke about was assistance with job seeking. They said it can be hard to know what sort of jobs can accommodate young people with additional needs. Young people said it helped to have an adult to identify supportive employers and workplaces. Some young people said their parents helped them do this while others said it was teachers, careers advisors, or youth workers.

“I know I want to get a job as soon as possible ... but the applications are a bit complex for me” – student Verona SSP

One area where young people said they would like more support was in maintaining employment once they started a job.

“Employers should gain knowledge about additional needs to accommodate those with additional needs. They can’t relate to us if they don’t have the same thing” – student, Verona SSP

Those who had positive experiences said that it was often because a teacher, youth worker, or employment worker had built up a relationship with the employer prior to employment and helped them understand the young person’s unique needs and implement strategies to support them.

Young people doing it tough and experiencing disadvantage

Young people doing it tough and experiencing disadvantage spoke about the negative impact these circumstances have on their employment experiences. Once again, the important role played by trusted adults and support people was highlighted.

“Youth work and family support are helpful to navigate systems like Centrelink” –young person, Street University.

Young people said it was hard as they were often looking for employment to be able to support themselves independently whilst also tackling multiple challenges such as mental health issues, experiences of trauma, insecure housing, and family breakdown.

Specialist youth vocational and employment programs were valuable to these young people for career guidance and early employment opportunities as they said they often did not have family or community connections to help them find a first job in the same way that other young people might.

“High school wasn’t supportive of me leaving year 10. I went straight into TAFE. TAFE was helpful and supportive of me though” – student, Campbelltown TAFE

Young people also described the way poverty and disadvantage impacted their employment and career decisions. They felt they were offered less opportunities than young people from more resourced backgrounds. This in turn limited the options available to them.

“I wanted to be a musician but unrealistic because my family can't afford to buy me sophisticated equipment ... If you aren't born into a wealthy family, you're pretty much screwed because of housing rates, blue collar workers are getting less pay” – young person, Julia Reserve

A number of young people spoke how specialised support had enabled them to keep up with their better resourced peers.

“A teacher mentioned about a scholarship to me and they helped me to get a laptop, and get a phone, get a mentor, and linked me to an internship” – young person, BELA

Not surprisingly, cost of living pressures was a significant cause of stress for this group of young people. They felt these pressures both because they were trying to support themselves independently and also living in families with limited income.

“Cost of living, everything comes back to money ... There's not enough to pay for necessities for food, rent... Not enough money to buy necessities and also study” – young person, Street University

Some young people spoke about having to choose between finding work to support themselves and their families over study or career decisions.

“School can't come first if can't feed self or pay rent” – young person, BELA

Many of the young people we heard from who identified themselves as doing it tough, relied on Centrelink payments to financially support themselves either between jobs or while studying. They spoke at length about the inflexible, punitive nature of this system which frequently resulted in young people having extended periods of time with no income.

“There was miscommunication about my appointments and they stopped my payments. I had 2-3 weeks of no payments” – young person, Street University

“There is a wait period for Centrelink, I have to wait 2-months from when I started the Centrelink application to receiving payments” – young person, Street University

In these circumstances young people said they turned to youth services or other support workers to help them navigate the system to lodge an appeal to get their payments reinstated. They felt this would be very difficult for young people who were not connected to support services.

One final area young people spoke about was the issue of access to affordable and reliable transport. Young people and families with low incomes often did not own a car which meant they had to rely on public transport. Young people said access to public transport in Western and South Western Sydney outside the main train lines was limited with services often running only every hour and finishing in the early evening. Students from Ambervale HS and Verona SSP said they had often to rely on their parents as their only transport option.

“Public transport is so unreliable” – young person, Street University

Additionally licencing requirements made it difficult for young people with limited finances and access to a car to get their licence.

“Getting your licence is hard as it’s expensive to get hours to obtain driver’s licence ...Owning a car is expensive” – young person, Street University

The impact of these circumstances was a reduction in employment options available to young people as they had difficulty seeking employment outside their area or in industries such as trade apprenticeships that frequently require employees to have a licence or a vehicle

Opportunities to improve youth employment

The young people we heard from identified a range of different programs and services operating in the region that they thought worked well to support young people to achieve positive employment outcomes as well as contributing ideas for what else they thought would work for young people in Western and South Western Sydney.

“When you surround yourself with better people who make you want to succeed” - Whitelion

Existing programs included: TAFE tasters programs, TVET and VET courses to obtain qualifications, various school-business partnerships offering work experience opportunities, specialist youth employment programs that provide individualised support tailored to young people’s backgrounds and life experiences, and youth development programs that offer transferrable work and life skills such as leadership, teamwork, volunteering, and interpersonal communication.

Young people stressed that they believe youth development or self-improvement programs can also help young people achieve employment goals and should be better resourced.

“In training to be Tai Quan Do instructor, gives you passion and purpose and lead to employment” – program participant, Whitelion

It was clear that young people from socially excluded backgrounds such as those discussed in the previous section face unique challenges that require targeted strategies and that young people wanted their lived experiences to inform the design of these strategies. The inclusion of young people’s voices in program co-design also allows young people to develop and practice important skills that are transferable into an employment context. As noted earlier, these groups of young people really appreciated youth participation opportunities as they often lacked the employment and professional connections available to young people from more resourced backgrounds.

Young people said the relational nature of any program is the most critical element. Young people want to feel heard, understood, and connected. When this happens they feel safe and are able to build their confidence, develop a sense of their own competence, and establish trusting relationships with supportive adults who are able to understand their live experiences and contexts.

Based on the information we received during the consultations, the following is a list of possible programs ideas that Jesuit Social Services could incorporate in their provision of employment and unemployment support to young people in Western and South Western Sydney. Some of these already exist in communities however young people indicated that there would still be benefit in having more availability of similar initiatives.

Individualised support options

- Place based specialist youth employment and career support in high unemployment areas of Western and South Western Sydney offering long term assistance for a minimum 12 months to young people with specific needs to assist them identify employment or education goals; provide assistance and referral to address any barriers; resume, job application, and interview support; and mentoring to maintain employment or education. Support should be prioritised for young people during transition periods when they can not access other support such as through learning institutions or job providers
- Mentoring support in the form of employer-young person mentoring to assist the young person to stay in employment.
- Mentoring support in the form of peer mentoring between a group of young people supporting each other to remain motivated to achieve their goals including securing and maintaining employment.
- In school mentoring support to assist students to navigate career pathways
- Coordinated partnership between young people, local youth services, and employers in growth industries in Western and South Western Sydney to identify employment opportunities and provide “wrap-around” to support for young people with additional needs or from social excluded groups to engage in these.
- Provide training and upskilling for NDIS workers to utilise their capacity to support their young clients with additional needs to achieve employment goals.
- Partnering with local multicultural services to provide tutoring support for Intensive English Centre students and or young people from culturally diverse communities requiring study support.

Work Readiness training

- Targeted work readiness program for specific cohorts of young people that includes life skills, confidence building, goal setting and highlights that young people possess a range of transferable skills from their life experiences such as problem solving, resilience, determination.
- Work skills qualifications for specific cohorts of young people with pathways into employment developed in partnership with youth services and local businesses
- Small business courses to help young people start their own business
- A program with year 10 and year 12 students offering transitional support post school to navigate education and employment pathways.
- Provision of program to support young people to obtain their drivers licence both learner and provisional to address the transport barrier that is preventing many young people in securing employment outside their immediate area.

Employer partnerships

- Build relationships with employers and business willing to employ young people from socially excluded backgrounds and offer lived experience training run by young people to improve employer awareness of young people's context and how to support them in the workplace.
- Link with business/industry to offer paid work experience opportunities and work taster opportunities to help young people make decisions about employment and careers

- Develop workplace rights guides and offer training for both employers and young people

Policy Recommendations to Improve Employment Outcomes

Youth Action's ["Bearing the Brunt" Report 2022](#) (p17) found that young people in Western Sydney consistently experience higher levels of unemployment than other areas of Sydney. In 2021 39% of all unemployed young people in NSW lived in Western Sydney.

The Report identified a range of policy recommendations that were informed by lived experience and co-designed with young people, including young people from Western Sydney. We have outlined these in this report as it was clear that current youth employment policy settings are not adequately addressing the barriers to education and employment experienced by young people, particularly those from socially excluded groups. These policy recommendations can be applied specifically to address issues for young unemployed people in Western and South West Sydney.

A coordinated and comprehensive strategy to address youth employment is essential to improve employment outcomes for young people. Ideally, this strategy would be in collaboration with Federal, state, and local governments, as each have a level of responsibility for aspects of youth employment policy.

The NSW State Government has considerable ability and responsibility to improve youth employment policy and address the supply and demand side issues that confront young people in the labour market.

1. NSW youth employment strategy

The NSW Government should implement a youth employment strategy to ensure a coordinated approach to the youth employment crisis. Development of a strategy should involve a review of existing programs and policy, identifying overlap with Federal programs, and identifying gaps and developing policies for improving the quality and quantity of youth employment in the state.

The strategy should be developed in consultation with young people, representative groups, and experts with specialised knowledge of youth employment.

A successful strategy will require:

- Adequate resourcing
- Collection of data on First Nations young people, young people with disability, LGBTIQ+ young people, culturally diverse young people, and disadvantaged young people;
- Increased coordination and cooperation between government and non-government organisations working with young people in transitional periods

2. Youth job guarantee

In collaboration with the Federal Government, the NSW Government should pursue a Youth Jobs Guarantee. Youth Job Guarantees and similar policies aim to ensure that eligible people are offered either a job, a paid internship, or a training opportunity within a short time after registering as unemployed.

This is not one policy; rather, it entails a suite of structural reforms to both the demand and supply side of youth employment policy.

The primary objective of a youth job guarantee is smoothing the transition from school to work, providing support in career planning, preventing long-term unemployment, and addressing labour market disadvantage for young people.

Demand-side

One of the key policy mechanisms the NSW Government can employ to improve the quality and quantity of jobs for young people is to engagement directly in job creation.

Public sector

- Expand the NSW Graduate Program to increase the number of positions available, locations and participating agencies. The NSW Government already offers 18-month entry level positions across a range of departments, giving new university graduates the opportunity to gain work experience, develop skills and insight into possible career paths
- Work with local governments to resource and create similar entry level positions.
- Expand the Disability and Aboriginal Internship Program. These two programs offer a short-term paid internships to university students with disability and who identify as Aboriginal. Each program currently offers 10 internships.
- Work with local governments to resource and create similar positions targeted at young people vulnerable to unemployment.

- Introduce a public service traineeship to young people without tertiary education targeting disadvantaged groups, including early school leavers, young offenders, those with a disability, those at risk of homelessness, refugee and migrant young people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Traineeships could be offered in a range of state and local government controlled entities such as arts and recreation facilities, libraries, utilities, health facilities and educational institutions.

Private sector

- Introduce a wage subsidy program for businesses and community organisations to employ young people. This could be similar to the Jobs Victoria wage subsidy scheme which offers \$20,000 to meet the costs of employing someone for at least 19 hours a week for 12-months. Priority should be given to programs that create jobs with opportunities for training, and where those jobs provide a pathway to permanent jobs.
- Increase paid traineeships, paid internships, and paid apprenticeships for young people.
- Expand the Dine and Discover NSW. This \$50 million voucher program was introduced during the pandemic to boost economic activity in the Sydney CBD and support small businesses. This is a great way to help reduce job losses and ensure that small businesses survive the pandemic. As the impact of the pandemic eases in central Sydney, the focus of the program should be shifted to regional NSW and areas of high youth unemployment such as Western Sydney. It should also be offered to people under the age of 18.

Supply-side

- Fill the gap left by Smart, Skilled and Hired. Reviews of the Smart, Skill and Hired programs, particularly the Youth Employment Program and Youth Innovation Challenge should be made publicly available. The NSW Government should improve these programs based on the reviews and reinstate funding for employment support services.

Improve youth services

- Invest in youth-specific, individualised case management for unemployed young people. Focus on outcomes related to sustained and quality employment rather than just job placement.
- Engagement with local employers and industry partners. Directly connect young people who are at-risk of disengagement from education with local employers, through case management and the wage subsidy program.
- Skill development should be forward focusing, encouraging young people towards areas of long-term, future employment growth.
- Improve career advisor program. Funding should be increased for full-time positions for career advisors in NSW Government schools, and particular attention should be given to schools in low-socio-economic areas. Additionally, resources and training for career advisors should be increased, allowing access to current information about labour market trends, government programs, pathway options, and relationships with local employer and employment services.
- In consultation with family, school, and advisors, consider allowing young people more flexibility in school-to-work transitions—for example, allowing students earlier access to post-school training.

- Provide more funding for TAFE. Young people in NSW should enjoy full access to affordable and quality education that meets their current needs and prepares them for the future.
- Improve transport affordability. Many young people are missing out on employment and education opportunities because they cannot afford the commute. Public transport should be provided for free to young workers and job seekers.
- For those not living in areas with enough public transport, the cost of a car should be reduced, such as fees relating to licences, registration and insurance.

Commit to reduce digital inequity

- Young people who miss out on the opportunity to benefit from the use of the internet suffer additional barriers to study and work.
- Improve labour market and educational information systems. Many young people have digital skills and would benefit from an easy to use, comprehensive online resource for accessing timely, high-quality labour market information. This could be achieved through expanding the Skills NSW database. This would enhance young people's capacity to identify and respond to labour market developments as they select and pursue career goals.

3. A voice for young people

- Young people are experts in their own experience and their views are essential to solving the challenges they face. Young people should be better represented in government decision making and their views should be considered.
- Include the views of young people in decision making. Ensure inclusion of young people's voice in the program design and implementation is a standard contract provision for all NSW Government funded youth service contracts.
- Introduce measures to ensure young workers rights are realised. Young workers are not taught their rights in the workplace and often do not have the workplace experience to identify or enforce them.
- Increase funding and review funding models for non-government organisations supporting young people. The holistic support offered by youth services plays a crucial role in assisting young people with their employment and career aspirations. Securing and maintaining employment is a common goal identified by many young people in their case planning with youth workers. The work youth services undertake with young people address issues such as mental health, substance use, homelessness, experiences of trauma, and learning deficits. Youth development programs build social capital and support networks, provide early intervention measures, and teach skills such as leadership, teamwork, and communication. These contribute to young people's capacity to achieve their provision of adequate and long employment goals.