



Creating Great Jobs:

How employers and young people can work together to create great workplaces for young employees.

**YOUTH
ACTION**

Acknowledgement of Country

Youth Action acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and understands that sovereignty was never ceded. Our office is located upon the land of the Gadigal people and we recognise their traditional and ongoing Custodianship and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

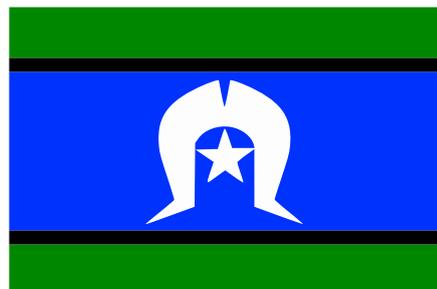


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About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak body representing young people and the services that support them in NSW. We advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups. Our vision is for a society where all NSW young people are supported, engaged and valued, and their rights are realised.

Principles that underpin our work:



We give a particular focus to regional young people, First Nations young people, those doing it tough, those with disability, LGBTIQ+, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including migrants and refugees.



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 and are led by the expertise of young people and the youth sector to be a trusted partner and collaborator.

About Social Ventures Australia

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a not-for-profit (NFP) organisation with the mission to alleviate disadvantage, towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. We influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives, advocating for change and influencing systems.

Over our 20-year history, SVA has taken a deep interest in the role of fair and equal employment as a key part of achieving our vision. SVA works with employers and young people across a range of initiatives to influence systems to deliver better employment outcomes for young people including by creating more pathways to good quality jobs.

Introduction

In July 2023, **Social Ventures Australia** commissioned **Youth Action** to consult with young people and create a resource helping employers to better engage and support them. This involved a consultation and co-design process that explored the definition of quality jobs to advocate for improved access to good workplaces for young employees. The aim was to capture the ideas, views and experiences of young people, to inform employers about the benefits of employing them, how to best utilise their skills and how to create safe and supportive workplaces where they can learn and work at their best.

Youth Action has heard from 359 young people about employment over the past 3 years. We also conducted a survey of 35 young people and brought together a working group of young people to look specifically at how employers and young people can work together to create great workplaces. This is how young people said they want to be supported in the workplace.

Top 10 tips for employers to create great workplaces for young people

Young people report that their limited employment experience and age can make them feel vulnerable when they start in a new workplace. They felt a culture of positive communication and trust between young employees and employers was the key to addressing this and supporting them to thrive in a workplace.

1. Provide comprehensive inductions

Comprehensive onboarding and training support young people to succeed in a new role. Develop ways to help young people to understand and meet the expectations and requirements of their role

Example: Provide written and verbal explanations of company policies and job requirements to a new young employee, talk through these in detail and prompt the young person to ask questions.

2. Create a dialogue

Regular opportunities for young people to ask questions and receive feedback from supervisors help them learn how to do the job and become more skilled in their role.

Example: Create structured and scheduled meetings with young employees where they have space to ask questions and discuss any challenges they have faced at work. Regularly check in and encourage young employees to ask questions they might feel nervous to ask.

3. Promote peer mentoring

Regular mentoring sessions from more experienced employees is a great model for having supportive conversations with young people. Young employees can also become great mentors to newer young people in a workplace as well.

Example: Assigning a mentor to a new staff member is an effective way for them to develop leadership skills, while benefitting the new employee by providing an extra level of support. Young people with some experience in the organisation can be great peer mentors for newer young employees.

4. Be proactive with Workplace Health and Safety

Providing relevant training, safety information, and access to mechanisms to raise issues helps young people feel psychologically and physically safe at work. Having regular opportunities for young people to speak to supervisors or senior managers can make them feel comfortable talking about safety concerns when they arise.

Example: Promoting a workplace culture that values safety by identifying areas of risk or concern and providing training that directly addresses these areas of concern. Get feedback from young employees about whether they feel safer at work because of the training.

5. Champion mental wellbeing

Implementing strategies to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all employees supports young employees who may not know how or where to seek support. Many young people have a good understanding about mental wellbeing and would be eager to help workplaces learn more about this.

Example: Your workplace can participate in workplace mental health events such as R U OK Day. This communicates to young staff that their mental health is important by their employers. It also provides a good opportunity to check in with employees.

6. Embrace inclusivity

Promote a culture of inclusivity that values the diversity in age, gender, culture, ability, beliefs, and life experiences that individual employees bring to the workplace. Ensure that bullying and discrimination are not tolerated.

Example: Celebrating community events such as NAIDOC Week, International Women's Day, Wear It Purple, Harmony Week, or International Day of People with Disability are one way to show all your employees that your workplace celebrates diversity. Young employees might be keen to lead the organisation in these celebrations.

7. Leverage young people's skills

Explore ways to identify the unique expertise that young employees bring through their diverse backgrounds and life experiences and how this could be utilised by the workplace.

Example: Ask your young employees what their unique skills are and how they might like to use them in the workplace. Providing these opportunities for young employees to take initiative will allow them to become more confident in their role.

8. Support a work/life balance

Work with young people to help them learn how to manage commitments outside of work such as school, study, training, and caring responsibilities, alongside their employment.

Example: Set clear expectations about the commitment you expect from your young employees and allow them the opportunity to speak to you about their outside commitments.

9. Educate about employees' rights

Providing information about workplace rights in relation to wages, entitlements and conditions makes young people feel valued and supported.

Example: Provide accessible information about workplace rights and responsibilities to your young employees. See the resources section of this guide for some youth-friendly examples.

10. Facilitate constructive feedback

Young people want to receive feedback that is practical and actionable. Providing regular, clear, constructive feedback to young employees supports them to learn how to be better in their role.

Example: When giving feedback to a young person, make sure to provide clear examples about what a young person did well and what they can do differently next time they undertake the task.

What we heard from young people about their priorities in the workplace

Young people value employers who take time to support mental health and wellbeing in a workplace.

Young people spoke to us at length about their experiences in workplaces where they felt their mental health was not supported in the way they had hoped. They told us that this can cause anxiety and that they often felt unable to raise concerns with their manager.

Young people said it was really important for them to feel that their manager would respond to any concerns with empathy. Employers who are non-judgemental and are intentional about speaking kindly to their young employees play an important role in creating a safe and supportive workplace.

“Being supported in my role as a young person is the biggest reason I am satisfied with my employer.” – Young person Creating Great Jobs survey 2023.

Young people appreciate workplaces that build a positive culture between employees.

The young people that spoke to us felt that respect and integrity between employers and employees is critical to building trust in a workplace. Some spoke about how they felt young employees were treated differently because of their age or lack of experience. Young people who might be new to the workforce thought this was especially important as they did not always know what to expect and were worried that they could be easily exploited.

“Good jobs go beyond fair compensation and decent working conditions, it encompasses upholding ethical principles and ensuring integrity.” – Young person, Creating Great Jobs survey 2023.

Young people also told us that employers that actively facilitate an open and honest work culture is essential to making them feel that they can work at their best.

“Establishing a positive work culture is essential for the safety and wellbeing of all employees, not just young people. This requires clear communication from employers and frequent check ins.” – Young person, Creating Great Jobs survey 2023.

To feel respected at work, young people communicated that it is important that they are given opportunities to speak and have their voice heard.

“[A great workplace for young people builds] a sense of community within the work environment, where everyone is respected and are given the opportunity to speak, have their opinions, thoughts and voice heard and listened to.” – Young person, Creating Great Jobs survey 2023.

Young people asked for comprehensive inductions to help them understand the expectations and requirements of their role.

Young people told us about the importance of orientation and onboarding in helping them to understand the expectations and requirements of a new role. Young people spoke about the anxiety they felt starting a new job without knowing what to do. One young person spoke about being handed only written policy and procedure documents for her to read when she came into her current position and found that it was not easy to understand.

“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, Youth Action Employment in Western Sydney Consultations 2022.

Young people feel comprehensive onboarding and induction that takes into account their newness to the workforce and gives the opportunity for them to ask questions helps to build their confidence and ability to improve in the job faster.

Give young people a chance or give them opportunities ... I want to be a leader so kids like me get a chance to succeed” – Young person program participant, Whitelion, Youth Action Employment in Western Sydney Consultations 2022

Young people feel regular opportunities to ask questions, receive feedback, attend training, and access mentoring from more experienced employees helps them grow and learn in their roles.

Young people coming into the workforce for the first time or entering a new position value regular opportunities to ask questions, receive feedback, and attend training so they can learn to do their job better, use their existing skills, and grow their capabilities. When talking about what they liked about their workplace, one young person spoke about how it was great that they had opportunities to try new things and push themselves.

“If I wanted to push myself and lead a game or help organise something I could. I think that's really important because it means there's room (and a bit of friendly pressure) to grow but it's not like I'm stressed to do so.” – young person, Creating Great Jobs survey 2023.

Several young people also raised how they valued opportunities to have an assigned workplace mentor that could help them understand the requirements of the job. They value having a contact person they can reach easily with questions while they adjust to a new role.

One young person told us about an opportunity they had to train new staff that were significantly older than them and spoke about how this made them feel valued, competent and like they could take pride in their work. They also explained that while young people liked working with other young people, they got along well with older staff that respected them.

Young people appreciate employers who understand and help them to manage competing priorities.

Young employees often have to balance competing priorities such as school, study, exams, training and caring responsibilities. This can mean they find it difficult to be flexible in relation to changing shifts or taking on more hours. Young people spoke about problems such as being assigned too many extra shifts than had been originally negotiated. One young person told us about how they felt pressured by their employer to prioritise work over university. Others spoke about supportive employers who understood their young employees school commitments.

“[My employers] were really supportive in giving me afternoon work instead of during the day work or expecting me to get there like 5-10 minutes after the bell. The same with my current job. I've been getting quite a bit of support from other workers and my boss and everything [who] didn't have like high expectations of me doing [work] during the day because I was still at school” – Young person, Youth Action Employment Report, open consultation.

Young people acknowledged that learning to juggle work and other commitments is tricky and they valued having open communication and supportive employers who helped them learn strategies to manage these situations.

Young people value employers who support them to understand their workplace rights

Young people value workplaces and employers who take time to thoroughly explain their rights in relation to wages, entitlements and conditions. Young people worry that some employers will try to take advantage of their lack of workplace experience by underpaying them or breaching other workplace rights.

Young people who are well equipped by their employer to know their rights and responsibilities talked about how they feel that their employers care about creating a safe and fair workplace.

Organisational benefits of supporting young employees

- Even though a young person might be entering the workforce for the first time, they bring with them an eagerness to learn and a readiness to start building their experience. Young people are well placed to absorb new skills and can develop these skills to specifically meet the needs of the organisation.
- Having a diverse workplace also extends to having diversity of age in your staff. Young staff can make a team more dynamic by bringing new ideas, perspectives, and values with them.
- Young people that have grown up with rapidly developing technology often have a good grasp of how to use different technologies in the workplace and are also accustomed to learning how to use new technological processes very quickly.
- They can also mentor and support others in the workplace to use different technologies.
- Fostering a culture of support in the workplace that ensures a young employee feels heard and supported is a great way to ensure that a young person learns quickly. This also means that young employees will be able to work independently sooner, and with less supervision. This keeps retention rates high, as young employees are satisfied with their work and conditions.
- Young people are eager to join the workforce and bring a sense of enthusiasm with them to a role. This can add to the workplace culture and invigorate other employees.

Assumptions about young people in the workplace

- **Young people do not have experience.**

While some young people may not have as much experience as an older employee might have, they still bring knowledge and skills with them and can learn quickly with the right support. Young people say they are excited to learn new information, especially when they are first starting their careers.

- **I will have to spend too much time onboarding a young person.**

All new employees need training and support when starting a new role, including young people. There are lots of resources designed for young people entering the workforce for the first time that you can use to support them to learn about workplace policies and procedures. We have included these references in the resources section.

- **Young people have not developed a good work ethic yet.**

Young people might be new to the workforce, but many have developed work ethic through study and extra-curricular activities. Young employees are often eager to start work and can demonstrate their work ethic in a new setting. Young people say that supportive employers play a very important role in helping them to develop a good work ethic.



What does a good workplace look like to young people?

This is what we learned about good workplaces from the young people we consulted with to inform this work. We identified the following 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.



Facilitated learning approach towards acquiring new skills.



Easily accessible workplace rights guides for young people.



A relational workplace culture where young people feel heard, understood, and connected to both managers and colleagues in the workplace.



Young people feel that 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.

What does a good workplace look like in the words of young people? What we heard through the Creating Great Jobs survey 2023:

My previous workplace promoted opportunities for young employees to have their say. We were guided by our managers, but not micro-managed nor treated as if we were inexperienced or ill informed. I loved having opportunities for training or to continue my university degree. The workplace applied a social justice framework to all aspects of our work which was great. I felt respected, valued and happy.

Friendly, welcoming and supportive workplace culture. Promotes wellbeing, work life balance and provides good pay.

Yes, my current job is wonderful! My boss took an hour or so to go through with me what I'll need to do for super and tax and stuff.

My manager would never yell though and if I did something wrong would wait for a good time to tell me (not in front of customers). She would explain her reasoning and let me explain my thinking and we would have a laugh about it.

[My workplace] had lovely, welcoming staff that were nice and inclusive even though I was just learning the job, which made it so much easier to come to work every weekend, and it eased my nerves that I had about beginning at a new workplace.

[My workplace] is a good place to work because the wages are very fair for young people and they provide lots of support.

[My company] built an environment with a sense of community within the work field everyone respected, there's a sense of community, friendship and team established help one another and socialisation.

When I worked [at my last job] it was good because there were clearly indicated roles, training before attending, requirements to be there, and a generally collaborative team.



My current job is a fantastic workplace. I am very satisfied in my role because I am well supported by my coworkers and supervisors. I feel free to ask for clarity, feedback or to suggest new ways of doing things. I know I am respected and valued because of this.

Employer Checklist:

What works to support young people

Job Security

- Young people in casual employment have access to permanent part-time or permanent full-time contracts if they choose. Employers support young people having access to information and advice about these decisions.
- Young employees have access to minimum guaranteed hours per week.
- Where possible, young employees receive advance notice when a shift is cancelled and offered another shift if available.
- Employers have supportive rostering conversations with young employees to help them have a level of choice and control over the hours they are working.

Pay and Benefits

- Young people have access to wage increases with experience.
- Young people feel their pay is appropriate for their role and experience and have the opportunity to discuss their rate of pay with their employer. Employers ensure that pay is fair, prioritise the correct payment of their staff and create an environment where young workers feel confident to ask about and discuss their rate of pay.
- During induction, employers provide young people with information about their rate of pay, benefits and working conditions.

Health, safety and wellbeing

- Employers build a workplace culture that is welcoming, inclusive and supportive to young people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences. Employers make it clear that the workplace does not tolerate bullying, harassment or discrimination.
- Employers work with young employees with particular needs if they require workplace changes or adaptation so the workplace can become supportive of their needs.
- Young people feel safe at work by having processes to address instances of bullying or discrimination. Young employees are supported to identify and avoid unsafe situations at work so that they can be prevented.
- Managers in roles supervising young people have the opportunity to undertake professional development about how to support employees who are learning on the job and how to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of their staff (such as managing burnout and work-life balance). This will assist in building trust and will normalise conversations about mental health issues in the workplace. It will also provide training for managers to refer young staff to support services and helpful resources.
- Employers are non-judgemental when discussing workplace health and safety or mental health with young employees.
- Employers are careful not to assign large amounts of overtime or too many shifts to a young employee to support the work-life balance of young employees.

Job roles and nature of work

- Help young workers understand their rights and responsibilities at work. Take the time to explain their pay and conditions, key policies and procedures and workplace values. It is important that young employees are not just handed complex policy documents to read, but that employers make sure information is accessible. Employers explain verbally what their expectations are and provide opportunity for young employees to ask questions.
- Employers support a young person to develop new skills in their role by providing opportunities to try different tasks and access training to learn new technologies and skills.
- Provide comprehensive induction for young employees. Ensure that training is appropriate to the level of experience, skills and knowledge of the employee.
- Maintain a safe working environment and make sure that young people are provided with appropriate safety training for their role.
- Managers set clear expectations when a young person starts in a new role and advises about how performance is managed.
- Employers make opportunities for growth and progression available to young employees.
- Young people are supported to find a sense of purpose in their work. This extends to encouraging young people to be curious in their role by making the workplace somewhere young employees are supported to learn and ask questions.

Social support

- Employers of young people facilitate good working relationships between their young staff and offer opportunities for peer support. This includes mentoring by more experienced employees for new young staff. Employers let employees know that they are a source of help and support. Managers and mentors take the time to listen and offer support.
- Employers take time to understand how to support young workers' commitments outside the workplace such as school, study, exams, training or caring responsibilities.

Having a voice and speaking up

- Young people are shown how to report abuse, bullying and other unprofessional behaviour. This includes how they can report behaviour by a manager, including their line manager.
- Managers facilitate genuine opportunities for young staff to give critical feedback about the workplace and their working conditions. Employers provide a safe space for feedback to be delivered and are willing to hear difficult feedback.
- Employers show their young employees how feedback will be incorporated, and employees are provided the opportunity to report on whether changes are working and to follow up if no action is taken.
- Employers are mindful about the creation of power imbalances between older and younger staff, including between young staff and their managers. This includes acknowledging that power imbalances will prevent young staff from being able to raise concerns and create anxiety.
- Employers ensure confidentiality when staff raise concerns and discuss how disclosures will be addressed. Young staff feel assured that they can discuss issues in confidence.
- Employers make information available to their young staff about the union relevant to the industry of work and staff face no barriers to joining and participating in a union.

Resources

For young people

- **Safety at work: SafeWork Young Workers eToolkit**
- **Accessible information tailored to a young audience about workplace rights and responsibilities:**
 - Youth Law Australia Employment page
 - Fair Work Ombudsman
- **Fair Work Ombudsman information for young people:**
 - Information for young workers and students
 - Employing Young Workers page
 - Employing young workers best practice guide
- **Unions**
 - UnionsNSW
 - United Workers Union
 - Australian Services Union

For employers

- **Safety at work: SafeWork Employers of Young Workers eToolkit**
- **NSW Government: Fostering a workplace that supports young workers**
- **Supporting the mental health of young employees**
 - NSW Government free coaching for employers seeking to create 'mentally healthy' workplaces.
 - Headspace resources for how to communicate with young employees about their mental health (tips for starting a conversation, responding to disclosures in the workplace and helping the young employee to make a plan).
 - **Headspace printable guides:**
 - How to have a supportive conversation with a young employee
 - Creating a mentally healthy workplace
 - Responding to disclosures of mental health issues in the workplace
- **How to make young employees feel safe and included**
 - YACVIC guide to involving young people
 - LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Language Guide
 - Intro to access and inclusion: working with young people with disability
 - SafeWork NSW Guide to creating a culturally safe workplace for First Nations employees



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