

**MISSION  
AUSTRALIA**

A young man with a mustache, wearing a white t-shirt and a black baseball cap worn backwards, is smiling warmly at the camera. He is standing in a bakery or cafe, with shelves of bread and other items visible in the background. Another person in a black shirt is partially visible behind him to the right.

**Youth Employment  
and Transitions**  
2019

# National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Transitions and Employment

## Introduction

Mission Australia is a national, non-denominational Christian charity that has been helping vulnerable people move towards independence for more than 160 years. In the 2018-19 financial year, we supported over 160,000 individuals through 519 programs and services across Australia.<sup>1</sup>

Mission Australia currently provides a number of youth engagement and transition services including Youth accommodation services, alcohol and drug rehabilitation services educational and employment supports and social enterprises such as Charcoal Lane, Café One and Synergy Auto Repairs. During the 2018-19 financial year, we assisted close to 5,000 young people through 21 services.<sup>2</sup> A full list of Mission Australia's youth services can be found in Annexure 1.

Mission Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the National Youth Commission's inquiry into youth employment and transitions. This submission is based on a combination of research including findings from our annual Youth Survey and insights from our service provision across Australia. It includes testimony from some of our practitioners and the participants they work with.

## Recommendations

- Young people need to be provided with opportunities to be involved in service design and development and there should be meaningful and continuous consultation and engagement of young people from diverse backgrounds throughout these processes.
- Targeted employment services that are engaging and youth orientated should be made available to young people and should be able to cater for the varying and complex needs of individuals.
- Income support payments should be increased including Youth Allowance, Newstart Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance to give young people the best chance of getting through tough times, finding suitable work and being stably and safely housed.
- Service models which have been evidenced to produce strong outcomes for young people should be expanded and replicated.
- Investment in safe, affordable and appropriate accommodation for young people should be increased, including social housing for independent living and targeted housing options that meet their needs, such as Youth Foyer options.

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<sup>1</sup> Mission Australia, Annual Report, 2019, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2019/1320-annual-report-2019/file>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

- Culturally sensitive and appropriate measures should be adopted to address the challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as a priority.
- Services to support people into employment should be tailored to meet the needs of diverse cohorts of young people and address discrimination against particular groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from CALD backgrounds, LGBTI people, and young carers.
- Improvements are needed to school curriculums with a greater focus on developing skills, career based learning and access to post-school supports.
- Admission to VET programs should be improved, including access to TAFE and apprenticeships for young people experiencing disadvantage.
- Measures should be adopted to replicate social enterprise models that provide flexible training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people and respond to local needs, including Synergy Auto Repairs as outlined below.
- Youth transition and employment services need to be adequately funded so that they are effective in supporting families experiencing intergenerational unemployment.
- A career guidance or counselling pathway should be created to support young people experiencing challenges to entering the labour market, particularly early school leavers.

## Nature of employment for young people

The Australian labour market has undergone significant changes over the past 50 years. Rapid economic, social and technological change has created particular risks for young people, including the casualisation of the workforce, a rise in part-time work and job insecurity.<sup>3</sup> The rate of youth unemployment and underemployment has also increased. Currently the youth unemployment rate is over twice as high (11.9% compared to 5.4% seasonally adjusted) compared to the general population.<sup>4</sup> This has a direct impact on young people who are experiencing increasingly fragmented and extended transitions into adulthood, reaching the milestones traditionally associated with adulthood later in life than previous generations.

Contributing to this is the increase of high-skilled jobs, influenced by rapid growth in new technologies and automation. This has been linked to an increased demand for a workforce with a higher level of education and qualifications.<sup>5</sup> These changes emphasise particular risks for young people, who often have little or no formal work experience.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Stanford, A turning point for labour market policy in Australia, 2019, accessible at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1035304619835075>

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, July 2019, accessible at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6202.0Media%20Release1Jul%202019?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6202.0&issue=Jul%202019&num=&view=>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Australia's welfare 2017, Australia's welfare series no. 13. AUS 214. Canberra: AIHW. 2017, p.1.

The Foundation of Young Australian's (FYA) *New Work Reality* report found that despite higher levels of education attainment, with nearly 60% of 25 year-olds holding a higher level of education than secondary school, entering full-time work is proving to be a significant challenge for many young people.<sup>6</sup> Young people aged 15 - 24 years have the highest underemployment rate in Australia and the prevalence of underemployment is even more prominent among lower-skilled occupations.<sup>7</sup>

Completing transition from education to work is increasingly difficult, taking young people on average 4.7 years to find full-time work after they leave formal education and 2.3 years to find any form of work at all.<sup>8</sup> Many young people face multiple challenges as they navigate the transition to adulthood such as finding educational opportunities, employment or housing. The successes or difficulties experienced during the transition post-school are linked to outcomes beyond further education and employment, including health outcomes and lifetime earnings.<sup>9</sup>

### **School curriculum, career education and school based work-experience**

School curriculums must place an emphasis on equipping young people with a greater range of skills and capabilities including critical thinking, problem solving, motivation and the ability to work creatively and collaboratively. Career development services, such as interview skills and building a resume should be made more accessible to young people through school.<sup>10</sup>

Offering work experience opportunities to students whilst at school, would have the potential to aid the effective transition of young people beyond the completion of their studies, creating networks with future employers, developing transferable skills and building clarity in relation to their career aspirations.

There are numerous national policies in place to identify the evolving employment market and the need for employment services to cater for the 'gig economy' and processes to ensure the transition from school to employment.<sup>11</sup> The *Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy* has been endorsed by Councils of Australian Governments (COAG) in February 2019 and highlights the need for students to acquire transferable skills, understand the evolving workforce dynamics and build on a strong evidence base across a range of domains.<sup>12</sup> The Strategy emphasises the need for students to possess career management and navigation skills needed to make informed

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<sup>6</sup> Foundation for Young Australians, 2018, The New Work Reality, accessible at: [https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA\\_TheNewWorkReality\\_sml.pdf](https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA_TheNewWorkReality_sml.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of statistics, Labour Force, 6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, Nov 2016, accessible at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main%20Features5Nov%202016>

<sup>8</sup> Foundation for Young Australians, 2018, The New Work Reality, accessible at: [https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA\\_TheNewWorkReality\\_sml.pdf](https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA_TheNewWorkReality_sml.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Youth Action & WESTIR, 2018, Inequality in Australia: A young person's perspective, accessible at: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018/08/apo-nid187901-1106546.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> R. Polvereand and P. Lim, Career development supporting young Australians: A literature review, 2015, accessible at: [http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/6033/1/PolvereLim\\_Career\\_development\\_supporting\\_young\\_people\\_lit\\_review\\_2015.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/6033/1/PolvereLim_Career_development_supporting_young_people_lit_review_2015.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See further: Department of Education and Training, National Career Education Strategy, 2019, accessible at: <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/52421> and Foundation for Young Australians, The New Work Reality, 2018, accessible at: [https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA\\_TheNewWorkReality\\_sml.pdf](https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA_TheNewWorkReality_sml.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Department of Education and Training, National Career Education Strategy, 2019, accessible at: <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/52421>

career decisions throughout their working lives.<sup>13</sup> It is encouraging to note that these aspects will be built into the existing curriculum. However, there is little clarity in relation to what actions are underpinning the objectives of the strategy and what resources are committed to ensuring the objectives are achieved. In order to ensure that the strategy is effective, an action plan should be made publicly available including a process of reporting on outcomes achieved under the strategy.

The future employment market is expected to be 'a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres; a progress defined by velocity, scope, and systems impact unlike ever seen before'.<sup>14</sup> There is a need for a structural and systemic approach to bridge the gap between the agile future employment market and the skills and training young people receive. One of the pragmatic measures is to incorporate adequately funded career counselling services for young people through state policy.

### Challenges to finding work

To understand the diversity of young people's experiences and aspirations, Mission Australia conducts an annual youth survey. In 2019, over 25,000 young people across the country aged 15-19 participated in the youth survey and answered a range of questions around education, employment, bullying and what barriers exist to achieving goals post-school.

Of the participants still at school, 95.8% stated that they intended to complete Year 12.<sup>15</sup> When asked what they were planning to do after school, *going to university* was the most frequently chosen option (64.8%).<sup>16</sup> Just over one third of respondents reported plans to *get a job* after school (33.6%) and almost three in ten indicated *travel/gap year* plans (28.8%). Overall, 11.7% of young people planned to *go to TAFE or college*, 11.3% reported plans to *get an apprenticeship* and 8.1% planned to *join the defence or police force*. A small minority of respondents (0.7%) indicated feeling *no choices are available to me* after finishing school.<sup>17</sup>

The Youth Survey respondents were asked to indicate if there were any barriers which may impact on the achievement of their study/work goals after school. Nearly half (48.9%) respondents indicated that they felt there would be barriers to finding work, with a greater proportion of females (54.5%) than males (40.5%) reporting the presence of barriers. Nationally, the top three barriers young people considered to be impacting upon them finding work were academic ability, mental health and financial difficulty (20.2%, 16.6% and 12.4% respectively).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Deloitte, Preparing tomorrow's workforce for the Fourth Industrial Revolution For business: A framework for action, September 2018, accessible at:

<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-preparing-tomorrow-workforce-for-4IR.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Mission Australia, Youth Survey Report, 2019, accessible at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Mission Australia, Youth Survey Report, 2019, accessible at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

The Foundation of Young Australians research also indicated that the lack of jobs, work experience, appropriate education and career management skills are seen as potential barriers by young people in their ability to secure full-time work.<sup>19</sup>

It is important that there are sufficient policies, programs and opportunities in place to give young people the ability to pursue their post-school goals and to overcome any barriers they face to achieving them.

## Helping young people experiencing disadvantage

Disengagement from education or employment during early stages of life can have a significant impact on young people and have long-term social and economic implications. There are a complex range of issues that can impact on a young person's ability to engage in the education system and workforce including mental illness, alcohol and other drug (AOD) dependence, contact with the justice system, and experience of domestic and family violence. Research also shows that disengagement from education and employment is not a one-off event occurring in isolation at the end of schooling. Instead, it is the result of a long-term process that can begin in childhood and continue throughout the course of a young person's schooling and later in life.<sup>20</sup>

## Young people experiencing economic disadvantage

Young people who live in households with parents without an income from paid employment are likely to experience generational disadvantage, having an impact on their wellbeing, school achievement and future work or study opportunities. Mission Australia's *Working Through It* report into young people experiencing economic disadvantage highlights the problem of intergenerational unemployment in Australia, which has significant long term consequences for parents and children.<sup>21</sup> Joblessness is the major cause of child poverty, with concurrent problems persisting into adulthood such as poor educational, health and economic outcomes.

Young people and families who live without paid employment over an extended period are at an increased risk of poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion.<sup>22</sup> Parental job insecurity has also been associated with poorer academic performance,<sup>23</sup> an increased risk of emotional and behavioural

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<sup>19</sup> Foundation for Young Australians, 2018, The New Work Reality, accessible at: [https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA\\_TheNewWorkReality\\_sml.pdf](https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FYA_TheNewWorkReality_sml.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> The Smith Family, 2018, NSW Curriculum review, accessible at: [https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/~/\\_media/files/research/policy-submissions/The%20Smith%20Family%20submission%20to%20NSW%20Curriculum%20Review%20-%20Nov%202018.ashx?la=en](https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/~/_media/files/research/policy-submissions/The%20Smith%20Family%20submission%20to%20NSW%20Curriculum%20Review%20-%20Nov%202018.ashx?la=en)

<sup>21</sup> Mission Australia, Working through it: A Youth Survey report on economically disadvantaged young people, 2018, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/899-working-through-it-a-youth-survey-report-on-economically-disadvantaged-young-people/file>

<sup>22</sup> J. Baxter, M. Gray, K. Hand, and A. Hayes, (eds.), *Parental Joblessness, Financial Disadvantage and the Wellbeing of Parents and Children*, Occasional Paper 48 Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> L. Strazdins, et al, Parent and Child Wellbeing and the Influence of Work and Family Arrangements: A Three Cohort Study, Social and policy research paper no.44 Canberra, ACT: Australian Gov., Dep. of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2011, accessible at: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/sprp\\_44.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/sprp_44.pdf)

problems in children and young people,<sup>24</sup> and lower aspirations and confidence in achieving their post-school goals.<sup>25</sup>

These findings underscore the need for expanded policy and service responses to address risks of intergenerational, entrenched disadvantage through education, employment and community programs. It is important to intervene early to provide the necessary supports to ensure the issues young people experience are remedied and that young people have the capacity to engage in a range of employment and education opportunities. Complex needs should be addressed through a range of wrap-around supports before they are in a position to access employment services.

### Inadequacy of social security payments

Young people, particularly those receiving Youth Allowance, Newstart Allowance and other similar social security payments are under significant financial stress, which impacts on their ability focus on education, employment or other challenges they might be experiencing.

For young people who are studying, the low rate of Youth Allowance makes them more likely to be reliant on paid work, non-cash assistance and loans to meet their daily needs, all of which adversely affect their capacity to focus on education. This issue is further compounded for those young people who are forced to live away from home.

#### Case study

Alexis\* is a 19 year old woman from South Australia who left home at a young age and has experienced homelessness. As she was not able to take many of her personal belongings with her when she left home, she had to spend her savings to purchase new clothes and other essentials. She is on continuous medication to address significant health issues. She also had some outstanding fines that she had to pay off.

She told her caseworker *“there’s no way I can pay for everything. Sometimes you have to pick, once a month I’ll do this and once a month I’ll do that and I’ll save that for the next month. Sometimes I will have to pay my rent so I won’t pay my phone bill, then I can be cut off.”* Falling behind payments regularly has also affected her credit rating.

If Alexis went to a doctor who does not bulk bill or had to purchase new medication, she would not have any money left for other expenses. She also indicated that if her education institute did not have sanitary items, she was unable to purchase them. She shares a rental property with two other people and it takes 1 hour and 15 minutes on public transport to the city and 1 hour to her education institution. There have been occasions where Alexis was unable to go to her classes because she did not have money for the bus ticket and she had to wait until she received her Youth Allowance payment to go back to the institute. There have also been instances where she had to get financial support from her education institute for public transport to get home.

<sup>24</sup> V. Moulton, et al, The Role of Aspirations in Young Children’s Emotional and Behavioural Problems, British Educational Research Journal 41, 2015, no. 6: 925–46.

<sup>25</sup> S. Webb, et al, Geographical and Place Dimensions of Post-School Participation in Education and Work, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2015, accessible at: [https://www.ncver.edu.au/\\_data/assets/file/0026/9908/geographical-and-place-dimensions-2776.pdf](https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0026/9908/geographical-and-place-dimensions-2776.pdf)

She has been struggling to find employment without access to a car. She feels that the employers prefer people who are able to drive and are not entirely reliant on public transport.

Alexis has looked into getting a loan but worries that she might end up with more debt. She informed her caseworker that she feels *“hopeless and worthless because I can’t do things in life because I can’t afford anything.”* She is continuing to receive support from her caseworker in relation to her mental health support needs.

\* Name has been changed for privacy

### Case Study

Jason\* is a young man aged 18 from regional Victoria receiving Youth Allowance who was experiencing homelessness after leaving out of home care. He has been couch surfing at friend’s places and staying in emergency accommodation. On several occasions, he has approached different housing providers to find stable housing, but was told there were no appropriate housing options available for him.

Being on Youth Allowance, he cannot afford to secure accommodation that is affordable and in an area with access to public transport. After the basic expenses of food, travel and other essentials, Jason is unable to save enough money towards a bond for shared rental accommodation.

He is worried that he will be judged by employers for a range of reasons including not having a permanent address and therefore, is reluctant to attend job interviews.

He has to rely on public transport as he does not own a vehicle. This coupled with limited public transport options, limit his employment opportunities as he is unable to start early in the mornings or finish work late in the night as there is no transport available. Although he is applying for a substantial number of jobs, he has been rejected due to his travel limitations. The case managers have observed a decline in Jason’s mental health due to mounting financial pressure.

\*Name has been changed for privacy

### Young people from remote, regional and rural areas

Mission Australia’s *Location Vocation Aspiration* youth report found that young people across Australia were likely to see achieving career success and being financially independent as being of major importance.<sup>26</sup> However, young people from low Socioeconomic Status (SES) areas were even more likely to say that getting a job was of major importance to them.<sup>27</sup> This demonstrates that some young people experiencing disadvantage are likely to prioritise employment and achieving

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<sup>26</sup> Mission Australia, Location, Vocation, Aspiration Findings from Mission Australia’s Youth Survey, 2014, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/387-youth-survey-2014-ses-report/file>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

career goals and therefore, should be provided with early intervention and other supports to overcome challenges to employment.

For young people living in remote and regional areas of Australia, location is a significant challenge in their ability to gain sustainable and meaningful employment and to access educational opportunities. The lack of the provision of public transport options between regional areas in Australia is a significant factor that impacts on some young people's ability to find and maintain sustainable employment as well as access education.

### **Learner driver mentor program (L2P)**

The L2P learner driver mentor program pairs young people with a volunteer mentor who assists them to learn to drive and build up their driving hours required to secure a license. It supports young people to achieve their working or education ambitions and targets areas of Gippsland in Victoria, where driving is essential for young people to get to work as public transport is lacking.

The gap between digital inclusion levels of young people, particularly those in rural, remote and regional areas is a significant challenge to finding employment. It is estimated that in 2018, 60% of the jobs are advertised online, an increase of 15% since 2012-2013.<sup>28</sup> With limited access to reliable internet, computers and other similar facilities, it is difficult for many young people to access information about employment opportunities in these areas. Thus, alternative information sharing platforms should be identified to support young people in rural, remote and regional areas.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people**

The unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over was 20.6% nationally (27.4% in remote areas compared with 19.3% in non-remote areas).<sup>29</sup> These rates are significantly higher than the average national unemployment rates.

There were over 1,500 respondents to Mission Australia's 2019 Youth Survey who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported that they were *studying full-time* (83.1%, compared with 94.0% of non-Indigenous respondents), intended to *complete year 12* (89.7%), and indicated that they were either *very satisfied or satisfied* with their studies (56.5%).<sup>30</sup>

To address issues that have a direct impact on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people engaging with education and employment, a range of measures must be implemented in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes establishing programs, which are driven by demand, are flexible in scope, provide intensive person-centred

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<sup>28</sup> Department of Employment, Skills, Family and Small Businesses, Sixty per cent of job vacancies in Australia are advertised online, 2018, accessible at: <https://www.employment.gov.au/newsroom/sixty-cent-job-vacancies-australia-are-advertised-online>

<sup>29</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4714.0 - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014-15, released April 2016, accessible at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4714.0>

<sup>30</sup> Mission Australia, Youth Survey Report 2019, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

mentoring and employment support, while also being culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. There is a need to focus support on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led employment and training programs.

Services designed to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people should be co-designed and implemented with community members, Elders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure they are culturally appropriate and effective. Particularly in regional and remote areas, relationships with the local community and having a strong understanding of local cultures and protocols are critical to developing the necessary trust from community members to engage with local services. Further, the location and confidentiality of services are key to uptake of support in small communities.

### **Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) School Based Traineeship Program**

School Based Traineeships School-based trainees work across a range of settings and train as allied health assistants.<sup>31</sup> Trainees complete one or two days a week of work experience and rotate each term through the Deadly Choices health promotion team, the Work it Out chronic disease rehabilitation program and children's therapy services. Trainees receive a comprehensive introduction to work as an allied health assistant, and are mentored by allied health and health promotion staff. IUIH is committed to mentoring trainees through their traineeship and into work and/or further study after training. Over half of the 2013 trainee graduates are currently enrolled in the University of Queensland Tertiary preparation program. IUIH is partnering with University of Queensland to launch Deadly Pathways. This program provides intensive support for Indigenous children from disadvantaged families to access practical pathways into secondary and tertiary education.

### **Young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness**

A supportive and stable home environment is important for young people and it is essential for good physical and mental health and has positive impacts on educational and employment outcomes. Stable housing also provides a platform for access to other supports in the community, through schooling or neighbours. As young people make the transition from childhood to adulthood, strong family connections are critical for support, providing freedom to seek out independence. When young people are estranged from family networks, exposed to unsafe environments or experience abusive relationships, they risk falling further into crisis, which can have a detrimental impact on their transition.

According to census data, in 2016, young people aged 12-24 represented 24% of the total estimated homeless population.<sup>32</sup> Domestic violence and family breakdown were reported by 37% of young people as a vulnerability they experienced, when seeking help from a specialist homeless service

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<sup>31</sup> Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH), School based Traineeship Program, accessible at: [http://www.iuih.org.au/Services/Research\\_Innovation\\_Workforce\\_Development](http://www.iuih.org.au/Services/Research_Innovation_Workforce_Development)

<sup>32</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, accessible at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2049.02016?OpenDocument>

provider.<sup>33</sup> There is a significant intersection between young people who are homeless, exposure to the child protection system and involvement in the justice system.<sup>34</sup>

For the first time Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2018 asked young people whether they felt there were any barriers which may impact upon them moving out of home in the future. Of those responding, seven in ten (70.1%) indicated that *housing costs* (e.g. rent, utilities) would be a future barrier to moving out of home, followed by *financial stability* (62.8%) and *availability of housing* (41.7%).<sup>35</sup> This demonstrates that housing affordability is a significant issue for young people, coupled with issues of financial stability.

Experiencing homelessness as a teenager is indicative of a higher risk of becoming homeless in the future. While it is not possible for all young people to reunite with family, programs that draw on extended family networks to support people post-crisis have shown great progress in reducing rates of repeat homelessness and have been key to reducing rates of recidivism amongst young people in the justice system.<sup>36</sup>

Mission Australia's *Youth mental health and homelessness report* findings revealed that psychological distress increased the likelihood that a young person had spent time away from home.<sup>37</sup> Young people with psychosocial distress were 3.5 times more likely than young people without psychosocial distress to have spent time away from home.<sup>38</sup> Those with psychosocial distress were likely to have experienced more than 10 occasions of time spent away from home compared to those who were not experiencing psychosocial distress.<sup>39</sup> Considering the close nexus between experiencing homelessness and mental health, it is imperative that there is sustainable investment in a diverse range of early intervention programs.

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<sup>33</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019, Specialist homelessness services annual report 2017–18, Cat. no. HOU 299, Canberra: AIHW, 2019, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2017-18>

<sup>34</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Children and Young People at Risk of Social Exclusion: links between homelessness, child protection and juvenile justice, 2012, accessible at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/children-and-young-people-at-risk-of-social-exclus/contents/table-of-contents>

<sup>35</sup> Mission Australia, 2018, Youth Survey Report, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/823-mission-australia-youth-survey-report-2018/file>

<sup>36</sup> Mission Australia, Home & Away: Child and youth homelessness report, 2016, accessible at: [https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/homelessness/doc\\_download/460-home-and-away-child-and-youth-homelessness-report-2016](https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/homelessness/doc_download/460-home-and-away-child-and-youth-homelessness-report-2016)

<sup>37</sup> Mission Australia, Youth mental health and homelessness report, 2017, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/720-mission-australia-youth-mental-health-and-homelessness-report/file>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

## Reconnect

Reconnect is a community-based early intervention service to assist young people aged 12 to 18 years who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Reconnect assists young people to stabilise their living situation and improve their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community, as well as addressing other needs, such as mental health, alcohol or drug dependence issues and improve life skills.

An evaluation of the Reconnect program in 2016 found that throughout the time in which clients were supported by Reconnect, improvements were found in their wellbeing, sense of control and support, housing permanency, family cohesion and financial condition.<sup>40</sup> The evaluation also demonstrated that Reconnect services fill a significant gap in existing regional service systems, including a central role in supporting schools to connect young people to other services in the community. Reconnect is a highly effective youth focussed early intervention model. There is an acute need for this service for young people, families and communities. To accommodate for this demand, the Reconnect program should be expanded to additional locations, particularly in communities with high levels of homelessness risk and the age range for referral should be expanded to include younger children.

## Targeted Youth Support Services (TYSS) - Tasmania

Mission Australia delivers the Targeted Youth Support Service (TYSS) in South Tasmania. The service offers intensive case management and therapeutic support for vulnerable young people aged 10-18 who are identified as having significant risk factors, which without support, could result in contact with child protection or the youth justice system. By working one-on-one with young people and collaboratively with their family, community members and service providers the service aims to; reduce young people's involvement with the Youth Justice system, improve family and peer relationships, self-esteem, health and wellbeing, address the risk of homelessness, increase engagement in education and community. Targeted Youth Support Service responds to young people as individuals and supports them to make choices and decisions that meet their needs and empower them.

## Case Study

Dylan\* was referred to TYSS by the school social worker and was 10 years old at the time of referral. He and was living at home with his mother, Trish\* and older brother. Prior to his referral to TYSS Dylan's history included experiences of long-term family violence, exclusion from school, extensive bullying, mental health issues and extreme social isolation. He had never engaged with

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<sup>40</sup> Mission Australia, Reconnect evaluation 2016, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/homelessness-research/687-reconnect-evaluation-report>

any support services and required extensive attempts of outreach by TYSS, to both he and his mother in order to engage with a face-to-face meeting.

Over time, with intensive consistent support from TYSS, Dylan now regularly meet with TYSS and improvements were made on his willingness to engage with alternative schooling. Encouraged by TYSS, the changes made to his routine resulted in a shift at home with a significant decrease in violent outbursts.

In addition to this, Dylan indicated interest in becoming more active and wanting to “*get out more*”. He identified that he couldn’t swim and that he would “*really love to learn*”. TYSS contacted Hobart Aquatic Centre identifying an instructor who was willing to coach Dylan at no cost.

TYSS observed this relationship with Dylan and his instructor to flourish and had a positive impact on Dylan’s belief that he is likeable and worthy. He was able to forge this important and healthy relationship with his instructor who was skilled in recognising certain vulnerabilities and positively challenge Dylan to achieve successful outcomes and challenge himself.

Dylan is now attending eSchool three days a week for 90 minutes a session. He is actively engaged in his local community. His feelings of confidence have increased significantly. TYSS will continue to provide support Dylan to maintain his relationship with his swimming instructor and will work actively towards a successful transition to mainstream education.

\*Names have been changed for privacy

### **Canterbury Bankstown Youth Service (CBYS)**

Canterbury Bankstown Youth Service (CBYS) assists young people and young families aged between 16-25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who are dealing with complex issues. CBYS provides a range of support services and accommodation options which clients can access in any capacity and at any stage of need. These include prevention and early intervention programs, crisis resolution, transitional and semi-independent accommodation, post-crisis support and case management services. The service provides a 24/7 crisis refuge and support for young people aged 16 to 25 from three to six months across five facilities. CBYS also offers semi-independent accommodation with the support of Mission Australia Housing and Evolve Affordable Community Housing.

Other models of supported accommodation coupled with intensive case management and coordinated supports including educational supports, such as the Foyer or Community of Schools and youth Services (COSS) models, will contribute towards preventing recidivism and increase community participation of young people. Youth Foyer model assists young people, usually aged 16-24 years, to engage in education and employment, and gradually to reduce their dependence on social services.

Youth Foyers generally have self-contained accommodation, on-site support workers, education programs, variable levels of support where a young person can progress to more independent living, onsite facilities (for example health services) and social enterprises (such as a café). Participation in education, training and employment is a condition of the accommodation. In these ways and because of their focus on independence, Foyers are different from traditional supported accommodation models.<sup>41</sup> An evaluation conducted on Youth Foyer found significantly improved outcomes for young people. For example, Foyer enabled participants to pursue the education qualifications necessary to sustainable employment.<sup>42</sup> The percentage who had completed at least Year 12 or a Certificate III increased from 42% at entry to 67% at exit and to 75% a year after exit. By exit, about 30% of participants had completed an education qualification higher than at entry, and a year later about 46% had done so.<sup>43</sup>

There is a need for more wrap around supports for young people experiencing homelessness or housing stress, as well as a focus on the provision of stable housing. Mission Australia advocates for increased investment in social and affordable housing and a national plan to end homelessness as part of Everybody's Home campaign.<sup>44</sup>

Further funding is required for services that can offer early intervention for young people at risk of homeless, in areas of their access to education and their wellbeing. The difficulties that young people are faced with trying to engage education but have support needs that are not able to be catered for needs to be addressed, particularly for young people under the age of 15.

### **Mental Health and wellbeing**

Facing barriers to employment can impact on confidence, hope and self-esteem of young people. Similar to 2018, Mission Australia's Youth Survey findings from 2019 indicated that the top three issues of personal concern for young people were *coping with stress, school or study problems* and *mental health, followed by body image issues*.<sup>45</sup> *Coping with stress* was the top issue of concern, with more than four in ten (44.7%) respondents indicating that they were *extremely* or *very concerned* about this issue. Around one third of respondents were *extremely* or *very concerned* about *school or study problems* (34.3%) and *mental health* (33.2%). Over three in ten (31.0%) respondents were either *extremely* or *very concerned* about *body image*.<sup>46</sup>

Mission Australia and the Black Dog Institute recently released *Can we talk? Seven Year Youth Mental Health Report 2019*.<sup>47</sup> This seven year report shows that close to one quarter (24.2%) of young people aged 15-19 years who responded to the Youth Survey 2018 reported experiencing

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<sup>41</sup> M. O'Shaughnessy, Somewhere to stay: models addressing youth homelessness, 2014, accessible at: [https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/OShaughnessy\\_Molly\\_2014\\_Somewhere\\_to\\_stay.pdf](https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/OShaughnessy_Molly_2014_Somewhere_to_stay.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> M. Coddou, et al, Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers, Brotherhood of St Laurence & Launch Housing, Melbourne, 2019, accessible at: [http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11369/1/Coddou\\_et\\_al\\_Starting\\_a\\_future\\_Education\\_First\\_Youth\\_Foyers\\_outcomes\\_2019.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11369/1/Coddou_et_al_Starting_a_future_Education_First_Youth_Foyers_outcomes_2019.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> See further: Everybody's Home Campaign, accessible at: <https://everybodyshome.com.au/>

<sup>45</sup> Mission Australia, Youth Survey, 2019, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Mission Australia, Can we Talk, Seven Year Mental Health Report 2012-2018, 2019, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

psychological distress. That figure has gone up from 18.7% in 2012 to 24.2% in 2018. Young females were twice as likely as young males to experience psychological distress, and this figure rose by 7.5% from 22.5% in 2012 to 30.0% in 2018, compared to a rise of 2.9% over the same period, from 12.7% in 2012 to 15.6% in 2018. An even higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported experiencing psychological distress at 31.9%.<sup>48</sup>

Young people who are experiencing mental illness are at a heightened risk of homelessness as well as facing concerns surrounding coping with stress, depression and family conflict.<sup>49</sup> There is a need for greater action to address issues of mental health in young people. Increased investment in youth mental health support services is necessary, as young people are increasingly voicing their concerns relating to mental health in our annual Youth Survey.

When experienced early in life, mental illness can seriously derail pathways into adulthood as it impacts on academic performance, higher levels of school drop-out and absenteeism, unemployment, interpersonal problems, increased risk of substance use and an increased likelihood of self-harm.<sup>50</sup> Considering the severity of unaddressed mental health issues among young people, it is vital that mental health services are made widely available for young people.

Following continuous advocacy by the community sector, there are some State Government initiatives that have identified the needs of young people and aim to provide appropriate supports, such as the NSW and Federal Government investment to increase the number of full-time onsite school counsellors or psychologists and full-time onsite student support officers. It is encouraging to see government investment into providing additional mental health services in schools for young people. However, there may be students who prefer to receive support outside of the school setting. Thus, a range of supports should be made available to young people including engaging young people, schools, medical and health professionals, community leaders, community organisations and sports and religious groups in developing and delivering services.

### Alcohol and drug dependence

Mission Australia's *Close to home: young people and the impact of alcohol and drug use by family and peers* report details the impact on young people of drinking and drug use of those around them.<sup>51</sup> Nearly three in ten young people (27.8%) *agreed that alcohol and/or drugs are a problem for my family/peers*.<sup>52</sup>

Factors that influence young people and their attitudes to alcohol and drugs include traumatic life events, ethnicity, social support systems and developmental factors, which may make young people more susceptible to alcohol and drug use.<sup>53</sup> If these factors are not properly addressed during

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Mission Australia, Home & Away: Child and youth homelessness report, 2016, accessible at: [https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/homelessness/doc\\_download/460-home-and-away-child-and-youth-homelessness-report-2016](https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/homelessness/doc_download/460-home-and-away-child-and-youth-homelessness-report-2016)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Mission Australia, Close to home: young people and the impact of alcohol and drug use by family and peers report, 2019, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/1300-close-to-home-young-people-and-the-impact-of-alcohol-and-drug-use-by-family-and-peers/file>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> S. Siggers, et al, Sex, drugs and indigenous young people, in P. Aggleton, A. Balland P. Mane, (eds.) Sex, Drugs and Young People: International Perspectives, 2006, pp. 200-219

adolescence, young people may experience significant disruption to their education, employment and relationships in later life, as well as any issues caused by their own subsequent alcohol and drug use.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the consumption of alcohol and drugs amongst their family, friends and peer groups, can have a significant impact on young people's lives.

### **Triple Care Farm**

Triple Care Farm (TCF) is a Mission Australia residential Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) rehabilitation and treatment program for young people aged between 16 to 24 years. The program specialises in treating young people with co-morbid mental illness and drug and alcohol problems. Through its holistic model of treatment, Triple Care Farm supports young people to experience long-term changes across multiple life domains empowering them to live fulfilling and self-sufficient lives. Through an evaluation of the program, it found that changes experienced by clients within the program, included sustained improvements in their physical health and wellbeing, stronger relationships with relatives and friends and greater engagement in education and/or employment.<sup>55</sup>

The majority of young people arriving at Triple Care Farm are disengaged from education and employment. The training and education stream of the program aims to help support each young person's recovery by providing them with skills and tools they need to pursue a more active and fulfilling life. The program offers a structured curriculum, which includes both accredited and non-accredited courses. Tailored individual learning plans focus on identifying and filling gaps in each student's skill base, as well as providing them with an opportunity to develop and pursue their own interests. Subject areas range from literacy and numeracy, computer skills, employment skills, creative arts and landscape management.

Sustainable funding and resources should be provided to early intervention, prevention and education services on alcohol and drug use from early school years through to adulthood and these programs should engage schools, families and local communities. There is currently a lack of youth specific withdrawal and rehabilitation services and a lack of treatment options in rural and regional communities. The absence of age and culturally appropriate services can intensify the issues in relation to alcohol and drug use within local communities. Having to travel significant distances to access, these services can impose an unnecessary financial and emotional strain on family relationships, friendships and community engagement. Further investment is required for more youth specific residential drug and alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation services, more treatment facilities in rural and regional areas and integrated treatment models that have capacity to deal with both mental illness and alcohol and drug dependence.

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<sup>54</sup> C. Spooner et al, Social determinants of drug use, Technical report 228, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW, 2004, accessible at:

<https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/TR.228.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Triple Care Farm: Baseline Social Return on Investment, accessible at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/382-triple-care-farm-baseline-social-return-on-investment-analysis/file>

## Targeted services to support young people

Programs that support young people need to fully understand the complex circumstances that can be faced by young people and respond holistically, integrating supports collaboratively from more than one service. It is also important for services to accommodate young people through their journey at their own pace, recognising the variations in the transitions which young people undertake.

Early intervention and pre-employment programs are useful in assisting young people in the transition from education to employment. Pre-employment support programs such as Transition to Work (TtW) assist young people to transition into employment or to re-engage with education.

### Transition to Work (TtW)

The Transition to Work program focuses on young people aged 15-21 who are facing barriers to enter the workforce to pursue employment or further education. Youth Employment Specialists assist young people in the development of practical skills, connection with education or training providers, engagement with work-experience opportunities and local community services, as well as identifying job opportunities to suit their aspirations and skill set and the needs of the local job market.

By intervening early to help young people stay in school, engage in training or find work, we can set them up for a better future. The program offers practical interventions to assist them in finding work including Apprenticeships, Traineeships or education.

Mission Australia delivers TtW in VIC: South Eastern Melbourne, and Peninsula, Gippsland. NSW: Sydney South West, Illawarra South Coast (Ulladulla, Nowra, Vincentia, Batemans Bay, Moruya and Bega). SA: Berri, Loxton, Renmark, Waikerie.

The expansion of TtW would have the potential to provide flexible support for a greater number of young people.

### Case Study

Mandy\* is a 21 year old young person from regional NSW. She completed year 12 and started a 4-year degree in Psychology. However, due to growing cost of living she deferred her degree to find employment. Although she was applying for a large number of jobs in a day, she was only able to secure a few interviews. She was unsuccessful in securing a job despite her best efforts.

She was referred to Mission Australia's TtW service. Mandy was provided with a range of supports including interview preparation, clothes for interviews and assisting with budgeting on a lower income. With the support of her TtW case worker, Mandy secured an interview at a well-established real estate agency. Her case worker followed up with the organisation after the interview and she was offered a traineeship which then turned to employment. Mandy stated that "I'm doing quite well there [at the real-estate agency] and have moved up fairly quickly. I'm really happy in this job and could see myself doing this until retirement."

\*Name has been changed for privacy

There remains a significant service gap for the majority of young jobactive Stream C participants who are ineligible to access TtW. These are the young people experiencing significant disadvantages in the community who have tremendous potential to join the workforce.

#### Case study

Josh\* is an 18 year old young person from NSW who was referred to a youth homelessness service due to family breakdown. Although there was no formal diagnosis, Josh demonstrated signs of anxiety and depression when he presented at the service. He was already attending appointments with a jobactive service. The employment service was not able to accommodate Josh's needs including his requests to schedule appointments in the afternoon. Due to a number of missed appointments, Josh's youth allowance payments were cut off.

His case manager at the youth homelessness service tried to support him to access TtW. Since Josh has completed year 12, he had to wait for 6 months to access the service. All these resulted in Josh needing intensive supported accommodation for a prolonged period of time.

After waiting the required 6-month period, Josh was able to access TtW. With additional support from his TtW case manager, Josh was able to update his resume and prepare for job interviews. He was successful in getting employment at a warehouse.

\*Name has been changed for privacy

Young people, particularly those who are disengaged from education may access alternative education and/or training options such as Flexible Learning Options (FLO) and other similar training programs.

#### Flexible Learning Options - SA

Flexible Learning Options (FLO) is a successful program in South Australia (SA) that provides casework support and individualised learning programs for high school students who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. The learning that FLO students access can be on-site or external to their schools i.e. in dedicated co-located or off-site flexible learning centres (FLCs), at VET courses or apprenticeships. In addition, their attendance is supported by active case management that helps students to work out personal learning plans, addresses barriers to learning and re-engagement supports them to access the services they need and links them to employment opportunities or social activities. Caseworkers advocate on behalf of students and their role is critical to motivating FLO students to achieve attainable learning and employment goals.

Mission Australia has been providing FLO in SA since 2007 and currently supports over 500 students through 32 different schools and locations. University of Adelaide's evaluation of FLO shows the successful outcomes which are achieved for young people who are disengaged from

school in South Australia.<sup>56</sup> It demonstrated that, as a result of attending the program and receiving casework support, the majority of FLO students are able to identify educational or job-related goals, as well as discover their ambitions and put strategies in place to achieve them.<sup>57</sup>

### Case study

Abby\* is a 19 year old young person from South Australia who joined Mission Australia's FLO program when she was 15. Abby disengaged from mainstream education when she was in year 9. She stated that she did not enjoy school and the structure of the education system. She was also couch surfing at the time.

She was supported to find appropriate accommodation and was provided with a range of supports. With the support of FLO team, she was able to complete year 11, Certificate II in hospitality and a few other complementary training courses. She indicated that she enjoyed the pace of learning and the fact that there were less people in the learning space compared to mainstream schools.

Abby was also supported to find work at a local fish and chips shop. The team assisted her with her plan to pursue tertiary education. Currently she is undergoing University of Adelaide's University Preparatory Program (UPP) and will continue her undergraduate study in a Science/Arts double degree.

\*Name has been changed for privacy

“There are very few programs like FLO that address the root causes of why a young person isn't engaging with learning, such as mental health concerns, bullying, homelessness, intergenerational poverty or low literacy levels ... We need more of these programs to support young people transition into adulthood”

Mission Australia, SA Regional Leader

Considering the successful outcomes produced by this program, a similar support model should be replicated across the country to assist young people who have or are likely to disengage from education.

### Vocational Education and Training (VET) Programs

Young people in Australia are confronted with significant challenges when entering the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. VET programs have the potential to play a vital role for young people in the challenging transition from school to further education and employment to prepare them for the workplace by equipping them with job-specific skills.<sup>58</sup> Young people may experience

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<sup>56</sup> University of Adelaide and Mission Australia, What does Success Look Like? An Evaluation of Mission Australia's Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program (South Australia), 2018, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/765-what-does-success-look-like-an-evaluation-of-mission-australia-s-flexible-learning-options-flo-program-south-australia/file>

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

<sup>58</sup> Youth Action, Uniting, & Mission Australia, 2018, Vocational Education and Training in NSW: Report into access and outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage, accessible at:

challenges when accessing or completing VET courses, including financial constraints, geographical remoteness and limited literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>59</sup> As a result, it is imperative that young people experiencing disadvantage receive targeted supports to overcome the barriers to accessing VET programs.

The challenges young people experience are often exacerbated by lack of information and difficulties with navigating the complex service system. Certain cohorts of young people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people leaving out-of-home care, experiencing homelessness, from migrant and refugee backgrounds, or with disability, have lower levels of VET take up and completion rates.<sup>60</sup> It is therefore important to identify and support young people through early intervention, individualised and proactive support to assist the successful completion of VET programs and courses.

There are complementary programs to VET, such as the youth vocational education pilot program under Try, Test and Learn (TTL) funded by Department of Social Services that provide targeted services to young people who are disengaged or likely to disengage from vocational education. This service model aimed to support students to increase educational completion, improve engagement in employment and improve social connection and support networks. The program also focused on early intervention by identifying students at risk, helping them connect to supports to resolve and stabilise escalating issues before students disengage. Programs such as this ensure that young people are provided with wrap-around supports so can continue their vocational education. However, this pilot program was not extended by the government despite a positive evaluation. Programs that are successful in delivering positive outcomes should be scaled up widely to have a long-term impact.

### **Creative Youth Initiative (CYI)**

Creative Youth Initiative (CYI), is a unique service that provides free TAFE accredited programs for young people aged 16-25 who are facing many and varied challenges in their lives, such as homelessness, mental health concerns, substance abuse, family breakdown, unemployment or poor educational experiences. Based in Surry Hills at the Mission Australia Centre (MAC), CYI helps young people develop their creativity through the visual arts program, Artworks! and the music program, Sounds of the Street. This in turn builds self-esteem, encourages self-expression and provides positive learning experiences in a safe and supportive environment. In addition, it provides young people with the opportunity to access free training programs run in partnership with TAFE as well as personalised individual support.

The CYI program demonstrates the range of diverse benefits, which young people can gain through the completion of TAFE courses in a supportive environment. Greater flexibility with VET entry requirements and additional individualised wrap-around supports are needed to ensure young

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<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/employment-and-training/762-vet-report-2018/file>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> S. Lamb, et al, Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners, NCVER, Adelaide, accessible at: [https://www.ncver.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0030/2096175/Improving-participation-and-success-in-VET-for-disadvantaged-learners.pdf](https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/2096175/Improving-participation-and-success-in-VET-for-disadvantaged-learners.pdf)

people experiencing disadvantage are able to commence and successfully complete VET courses. This should include increased access to literacy and numeracy support and other foundation level courses in community-based locations as well as expanded opportunities for fee-free scholarships for young people experiencing disadvantage.

### Social enterprises to support young people

Social enterprise programs provide work and education opportunities for people who are often excluded from the workforce based on long-term unemployment or disengagement from schooling, or experiencing generational disadvantage and/or disengagement from the community. These programs also reduce the risk of social isolation, alcohol and drug dependence related issues and engagement with the criminal justice system for the young people involved.

However, these models often rely heavily on private investments and donations to provide the necessary intensive services to trainees and apprentices. With certainty of funding, these successful models of social enterprises can be replicated and expanded. The Government could also explore the possibilities of facilitating investments from the private sector into social enterprises to increase employment opportunities and outcomes of those experiencing disadvantage.

#### **Synergy Auto Repairs**

Synergy Auto Repairs is a social enterprise based in North Melbourne that offers customers a full suite of smash repair services, while providing a flexible accredited training program and support for young people aged 16-20 years with a history of motor vehicle related offences. Synergy Auto Repairs has been in operation for 5 years, supported over 100 young people during this period and repaired over 3,000 vehicles.

The program engages young recidivist vehicle offenders; harnessing their interest in cars and aims to help them build a career in a field that matches their interests. The social enterprise equips participants with the skills to commence a smash repairs apprenticeship. The initiative is an Australian-first partnership between Mission Australia, the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC), Kangan TAFE, and Suncorp Group. Young people are referred to the program through Mission Australia services, Victoria Police and Youth Justice.

The training program runs for six months and gives students the practical experience and skills needed to start a panel beating or spray-painting apprenticeship. Participants also work toward completing an industry-recognised accreditation in panel beating or spray painting. Students gain on-the-job training and work experience from qualified auto industry professionals; supported by a team of tradespeople and a fulltime Student Support Coordinator.

An independent evaluation of Synergy found participants experience strong improvements in overall wellbeing, social stability and a willingness to work and stay away from negative influences

during their time at Synergy, in addition to developing the skills needed to build a sustainable career pathway.<sup>61</sup>

### Case study

Tim\* a 20 -year-old young person from a migrant background was referred to the Synergy Auto Repairs Program in mid-2016, as a 17 -year -old, by Melbourne Children’s Court Education Justice Initiative. At the time, Tim had just been remanded to Parkville Youth Justice Precinct in relation to a serious and high-profile offence, including aggravated burglary and armed robbery.

Prior to his offence, Tim had been expelled from his previous school and thereafter, two schools rejected his application. Due to lack of engagement with social networks and frustration with lack of opportunities for him to participate in education or employment, Tim began associating with other young people his age who were also in similar situations. This led to Tim engaging in anti-social behaviour.

His family was unaware of the negative peer influence in his life. When Tim was arrested, his family members were shocked and devastated by the seriousness of the offence. This created a divide between Tim and his family as well as other members of his community.

With the commitment and support of Synergy Auto Repairs to engage with Tim, he was released from custody on bail in July 2016 after spending 21 days on Remand. Tim identified a number of goals, including re-engaging in education and training, addressing his Youth Justice related issues, gaining work-readiness skills, and ultimately obtaining long-term employment.

Over the course of 6 months, Tim worked towards completing his Certificate II in Autobody Repair Technology, attending regular classes at Kangan’s Automotive Centre of Excellence, Tim also gained hands-on experience in Synergy’s commercial workshop, working alongside qualified tradesmen. Throughout this time, Tim took charge of his youth justice issues, regularly attending Melbourne Children’s Court and Youth Justice appointments.

By the time Tim finished his training at Synergy and received his qualification, his legal matters were still pending. At the completion of the program, Tim went into full-time work as an apprentice spray painter, attended two Youth Justice meetings per week and maintained regular participation in other support programs.

He participated in Group Conferencing which aims to divert young people from more intensive court decisions, whilst holding them accountable for their offending behaviour. Group Conferencing also helps them to repair the harm caused to the victims and the community. Synergy’s Student Support Officer accompanied Tim to attend these meetings and observed the impact, stress and anxiety his past actions were still causing him and how much he wanted to mend his relationships with his family and regretted his actions.

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<sup>61</sup> M. Thielking, J. Pfeifer, K. Nolan, & C. Boyce, Synergy Automotive Repairs Program: Process Evaluation Report. Melbourne, 2016, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people>

Tim received a 12-month Youth Attendance Order, which meant he didn't have to spend more time in custody but complete 4 hours of community service and 4 hours of Youth Justice appointments per week whilst being employed full-time. This decision was appealed by the prosecutors. However, the prosecutors later withdrew the appeal considering the progress made towards rehabilitation. Tim has since reconnected with his family and is maintaining a successful career in the automotive industry.

\*Name has been changed for confidentiality

### Charcoal Lane<sup>62</sup>

Charcoal Lane is Mission Australia's social enterprise in Fitzroy, Victoria that combines a restaurant specialising in native flavours with a comprehensive training program for young people who have experienced vocational and non-vocational challenges to employment. Charcoal Lane enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other young people to gain both accredited hospitality qualifications and professional experience within a supportive developmental environment. On completing traineeships at the restaurant, young people are well prepared to move into careers in hospitality, or other related industries.

### Café One

The Café One program aims to provide a safe and supportive environment to empower and support young people aged 16 to 24 years who are disengaged from schooling, homeless or at risk of homelessness or experiencing disadvantage by providing employment training, to help break the cycle of disadvantage and achieve goals towards independence. Café One mobile vans in the Northern Territory and Queensland, move to different locations with the support of local councils and business groups, helping to highlight the program to the wider audience and engage various communities, and improve the social skills of the participants. The presence of the Café serves to encourage other at risk young people to approach and seek information and referrals, and provide additional opportunities for our case workers to engage at a much deeper level with the young people through an assessment of broader needs and case plans to help them to achieve their goals.

Programs such as Café One rely on philanthropic funding, which only provides short term security of funding to a vital support for young people in the Northern Territory. There are limited supports available for young people to develop vocational skills, learning to become independent and creating opportunities to prevent social isolation and broaden their networks.

"The majority of funding and support available for young people focus on those who have been engaged in the justice system and we clearly support this. But there are little or no

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<sup>62</sup> Charcoal lane is a social enterprise managed by Mission Australia, more information available at: <https://www.charcoalane.com.au/>

support available for young people who need just a little bit of support to address issues so that they can get their life back on track. We strongly recommend that more youth specific services are co-designed with young people in the NT to make sure they are receiving the support they need to complete education and smoothly transition into adulthood.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager NT

Models that provide the opportunity for long-term positive outcomes for young people need to be replicated across the country and should be done in collaboration with employers, community sector organisations as well as relevant government departments.

With greater funding, these successful models of social enterprises can be expanded and provide education and employment to trainees and apprentices. The possibility of facilitating investments from the private sector into social enterprises to increase employment opportunities and outcomes of those experiencing disadvantage should be explored.