



Inquiry into the Queensland Government's economic response to COVID-19

A submission to the:
Economics and Governance Committee

Prepared by:
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Introduction

yourtown welcomes the Economic and Governance Committee's inquiry into the Queensland Government's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The scale of the economic effects of the pandemic and the pandemic's unknown duration require rigorous scrutiny and debate to ensure that Queensland acts swiftly to lessen the economic impacts of the pandemic, and is well placed to respond to, and mitigate, the economic effects of future disasters.

Queensland and Australia have fared comparatively well in relation to the pandemic and both the individual and coordinated policy responses of Australian, state and territory governments have played an important part in this success. Nonetheless, the economic effects of lockdown have detrimentally affected many individuals, families and communities, and it has been widely noted that young people – and particularly young women – have, and are likely to be, most severely impacted by the economic downturn.

In April and May 2020, our Kids Helpline service experienced a 36% increase in demand (when compared to the same period in 2019). Some of this increased demand included contacts from young people who: had lost employment due to COVID restrictions imposed by governments; were concerned about how to meet their immediate financial needs; and who had expressed despair about what effects the crisis will have on their future career.¹ Our employment services have already met, or are braced for, significant increases in jobseekers as young people – especially young women – work in industries hardest hit by the lockdown, and young people are typically hardest hit by a recession. The digital divide has also prevented many young people who access our education engagement and employment services from being able to effectively engage with online school and **yourtown** program work.

Many of the economic issues that the pandemic and lockdown have created for young people have long been issues for significant cohorts of disadvantaged young people and, unlike those for older populations, higher rates and durations of youth unemployment and under-employment have yet to recover since the GFC. The pandemic has further compounded this economic disadvantage and brought it into sharp relief.

The additional effects of lockdown on young people – including increased poor mental health, which greatly affects young people's ability to participate effectively both socially and economically – are likely to exacerbate the scale of the economic impact on Australia's youngest generation. Young people, therefore, must be prioritised in ongoing government responses to the pandemic or many more disadvantaged young people will be pushed into poverty, and a generation will feel the economic scars of this crisis over their life course. This will have exponential cost impacts for all levels of government in the longer term, if not addressed earlier.

In our submission, we acknowledge and commend the Queensland and Australian Government's significant efforts to minimise the economic effects on Queenslanders. We also recognise how government approaches to unemployment, such as Queensland's government's long-standing

¹ When compared to figures covering the same period in 2019.

social procurement contracts with our social enterprises, so effectively give disadvantaged young people the opportunity to succeed. However, as a youth specialist provider of employment services, we also share our insight into how the pandemic and lockdown has affected our clients and, in view of this impact, ask that the Queensland Government urgently prioritises the needs of young people in the economic policies it develops and works with the Australian Government to ensure that it does the same.

yourtown services

yourtown is a national organisation and registered charity that aims to tackle the issues affecting the lives of children and young people. Established in 1961, **yourtown's** mission is to enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their life outcomes. **yourtown** provides a range of face-to-face and virtual services to children, young people and families seeking support. These services include:

- Kids Helpline, a national 24/7 telephone and on-line counselling and support service for 5 to 25 year olds with special capacity for young people with mental health issues
- Employment and social enterprises, which support young people into employment, including programs for youthful offenders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services.
- Education engagement programs supporting young people at risk of disengaging from formal education early.
- Parentline, a telephone and online counselling and support service for parents and carers
- Mental health service/s for children aged 0-11 years old, and their families, with moderate mental health needs
- Accommodation responses to young parents with children who are at risk and to women and children seeking refuge from family and domestic violence
- Young Parent Programs offering case work, individual and group work support and child development programs for young parents and their children

yourtown's work with unemployed young people

We have over 20 years of experience helping young people who face significant barriers to finding and keeping a job. We currently deliver youth specialist jobactive services under subcontract to MAX Employment in 26 locations, Transition to Work in 12 locations across four states, and ParentsNext in Port Pirie and adjacent communities in South Australia. As a result of our experience, we are currently piloting an innovative approach to addressing long-term youth unemployment in Elizabeth, South Australia, Caboolture in Queensland and Burnie-Devonport, Tasmania called your job your way.

We also operate social enterprises that aim to tackle long-term youth unemployment and disadvantage by providing young people with paid work experience and training as a stepping stone to open employment. Our social enterprises employ young people aged 15-25 years, who are not yet work-ready, and transitions them to sustainable employment through a combination of paid work, on the job training, and support to overcome personal barriers.

We are one of the largest providers of labour market programs within Queensland through the Government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) initiative. Since 2012, we have provided a range of SQW programs that assist young people experiencing unemployment and disadvantage to gain the confidence, skills and experience they need to successfully participate in the workforce.

yourtown submission

Given our experience and expertise in delivering youth (un)employment services and that employment is a key contributor to Queensland's economic prosperity, our submission is framed around the issue of youth unemployment and the pandemic, and the issues that confront young people during this time including the digital divide. It includes discussion of the Queensland and Australian Government's responses so far to the economic difficulties that young people have experienced, and our recommended economic policy solutions to ensure young people receive the support they need.

yourtown insight: youth unemployment and the pandemic

There has been considerable coverage on how the response to the pandemic and the subsequent economic downturn has and will continue to disproportionately affect youth employment. It is a concern that we share since youth unemployment has long been a significant social and economic issue, with the unemployment rate being significantly higher than (about double) the unemployment rates of those aged over 25. Furthermore, unlike that of the older population, youth unemployment has not responded to economic upturns, with the effects of the GFC still evident in youth employment figures today.

Despite Australia having experienced economic growth for some 30 years, youth unemployment has not been below 10% since 2009 in Queensland,² and in recent years, has hovered between 10-15%.³ In May 2020, Queensland's youth unemployment rate stood at 18.5% (compared to 16.1% nationally). This is an increase of 3.9% from March 2020 and it is widely expected to rise when the full effects of the recession are felt and if the Jobkeeper allowance is not extended or replaced.⁴ Reflecting these increases, young people registered to our Transition to Work programs have increased from March to June by 72% in Queensland (by 77% nationally) and our jobactive caseload of those clients who are not long-term unemployed has increased by 8% in Queensland (by 12% nationally).⁵

The economic downturn looks set to disproportionately affect young women given they work in jobs and industries most affected by lockdown.⁶ Whilst unemployment rates nationally have increased by 2% for both men and women (although in Queensland male unemployment has increased by 2.1% and female unemployment has increased by 3.4%), unemployment has increased by 2.7% for young males and by 4.6% for young females.⁷ **This trend is reflected in our jobactive data with there being a 14% increase in new female clients from Queensland between March and June (30% increase nationally), compared to a 7% increase in new male clients (15% increase nationally).**⁸

² Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force data, Australia, May 2020. Please note, Queensland specific youth unemployment data is not seasonally adjusted.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Data compared was taken from our jobactive and Transition to Work caseloads on 1 March 2020 and 1 June 2020. The caseload is a point in time capture and not cumulative. Job seekers get commenced, suspended, transferred, or exited on a daily basis.

⁶ <https://theconversation.com/young-women-are-hit-doubly-hard-by-recessions-especially-this-one-140943>

⁷ The data is not available for youth unemployment by gender by state and territory

⁸ Data compared was taken from our jobactive caseload on 1 March 2020 and 1 June 2020.

A number of different factors contribute to high youth unemployment; lack of experience; credential inflation; the increasing casualisation of employment and; fewer low-skill, entry-level roles, resulting in a reduced pool of accessible and secure jobs for young people. In an economic downturn, these factors are accentuated and then further compounded by older people delaying retirement, whilst the scarring effect of economic downturns on young people has been found to be lifelong, particularly for those most disadvantaged.⁹ Furthermore, the mental health and wellbeing of young people suffers the longer they remain unemployed, with long-term unemployment itself is a contributing factor to mental ill-health, and in turn poor-mental health being a barrier to finding work.¹⁰ Long-term youth unemployment is also considerably higher than that of those aged over 25, doubling since the GFC to just over 18% in October 2019, with one in 10 unemployed young people now long-term unemployed and already **our jobactive caseload of long-term unemployed has seen an increase of 8% in Queensland (5% nationally) since March.**¹¹

In addition, young people are most greatly affected by underemployment. For 15-64 year olds, the underemployment rates were 8.8% in March, 13.8% in April and 13.1% in May this year (we assume the dip in May relates to an increase in unemployment in this cohort).¹² For 15-24 year olds, the same data were 19.1%, 23.6% and 21.7% respectively.¹³ Again, young women are most affected by underemployment with the same data for young males standing at 17.8%, 21.6% and 20% respectively and for young females 20.5%, 25.9% and 23.6% respectively.¹⁴ Furthermore, studies using ABS and HILDA survey data have demonstrated that young people with lower levels of education are also more likely to be underemployed than their peers with higher levels of education who work part-time, and the jobs of the underemployed are also less likely to be secure, with 7% of full-time, 40% of part-time workers and 57% of underemployed employed on a casual basis.¹⁵ Many people who are underemployed also likely to remain so, with 36% remaining underemployed a year on, 9% having left the workforce altogether despite still wanting to work, around 25% having accepted their hours of underemployment, around 25% having secured more hours of employment and 5% having left the workforce by choice.¹⁶

With young people disproportionately working in the industries affected by the lockdown such as retail and hospitality, and disproportionately working as casual employees ineligible for Jobkeeper, the scale of the predicted challenge to youth unemployment presented by the pandemic is of deep concern. If young people are not appropriately supported, the pandemic could be responsible for developing a generation of young people unequipped to participate socially and economically in our communities. This result is not only morally unacceptable for the young lives concerned but also, given the forecast decline in immigration and an ageing population, would leave communities and labour markets unable to meet society's challenges and needs.

⁹ <https://theconversation.com/the-next-employment-challenge-from-coronavirus-how-to-help-the-young-135676>

¹⁰ <https://www.yourtown.com.au/sites/default/files/document/Tackling%20Long-term%20Youth%20Unemployment%20Position%20Statement.pdf>

¹¹ http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11694/1/BSL_Prospertys_children_youth_unemployment_Dec2019.pdf

¹² ABS 6202.0 Labour Force, Australia, May 2020, Table 22

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2018/aug/09/underemployment-has-risen-and-its-young-people-paying-the-price>

¹⁶ Ibid

- **The Digital Divide**

The transition of many services to online delivery in response to COVID-19 restrictions assisted children and young people to continue to access the support they need, continue with their education and engage with a range of other activities important for their economic futures, as well as their health, wellbeing and personal development. However, for many children and young people confronted by deep and persistent disadvantage, difficulties in accessing online services – or digital exclusion – were compounded by the lock down. This was the case for young people engaged in our education engagement and employment programs in South East Queensland (Youth Engagement Program, YEP and Get Set For Work, GSFW) and South Australia (Flexible Learning Options, FLO).

Not being able to access online support and to have the capacity and skills required to navigate the online world is of significant detriment to this cohort of young people and will hinder their ability to obtain the education they need, to find work and to maintain employment. The challenges they face are set out below:

- **No access to a laptop, tablet or PC.** Many young people participating in our education engagement programs do not have any appropriate devices at home on which they could work (including for program, school or TAFE work), particularly those from large families. They only have mobile phones, and often old phones that are incompatible with new apps or function poorly, while some do not have smart phones. Many of the schools we work with did not have laptops to lend to our clients or did not provide them as the young people had in the past lost a cord or damaged them, or schools simply did not have enough.

As a result, program staff undertook a range of different approaches to assist clients and keep them engaged:

- They organised to lend them **yourtown** laptops and tablets. Agreements were set up to assist this process, and in some areas laptops were lent to clients during the school day hours only to avoid unforeseen issues in relation to their misappropriation, which meant staff dropped them off and picked them up every day.
- Where schools declined to deliver hard copies of school work to students, they organised to collect paper copies of school work from schools and drop them off at clients' homes at the start of the week and pick them up at the end of the week to return to the school. Many clients felt that admitting they did not have a device they could use at home to teachers was embarrassing and would not go to school to collect school work.
- Provided a number of young people with a mobile phone. For example, the family of one of our female clients only have one phone between eight people. She has significant mental health issues and needed to access headspace and Kids Helpline virtually so we gave her a smart phone to enable her to access the support she needed and therefore continue to engage with our program.

- Advocated on behalf of clients to schools in relation to the provision of laptops in the future to students who do not have them.
- **Limited or poor internet access.** Not all households of our clients have Wi-Fi or access to unlimited internet data, whilst public places providing free WIFI access were closed. Some clients, particularly those who live in rural areas, do not have good internet reception and cannot download certain school/program activities such as videos, whilst software such as Zoom takes up significant amounts of data. We assisted clients with unlimited internet access by providing them with OPTUS sim cards with data credit and providing them with tablets with internet connections. In addition, protection was put in place to ensure only suitable websites could be accessed.
- **Digital literacy issues.** Whilst young people are digital natives in relation to smartphones, social media apps and games, in many cases that does not correspond to having the digital literacy to engage in other online programs. Our staff had to help many young people download and use software relating to school or yourtown program (e.g. email, Teams, Zoom). Often staff had to coach them through using online platforms and even with tasks such as the activation of sim cards as they struggled with instructions.
- **Digital platforms ill-suited to teaching some vulnerable cohorts.** In our experience, digital platforms are ill-suited to disadvantaged cohorts in terms of: 1) ability to engage, and 2) the level of support/assistance it can provide, and 3) lack of suitable environment as explained below.
- **Ability to engage.** Our specialist education and employment programs are designed around relationship-based programming, with face-to-face interactions an important element of this. While program staff connected (or attempted to) virtually with them, or attempted to, many clients simply did not want to engage on this platform.

Sometimes this was due to their poor digital literacy and sometimes this was because they had fallen out of the routine set by face-to-face activities, slept in and spent days gaming or watching TV series and with this came notable changes in mood and even symptoms of depression. Even for those clients who initially engaged online, this proved to be due to it being a novelty, and they increasingly disengaged the longer the lockdown persisted. Some students have said that they will go back to school in the new year due to the impact the pandemic has had and them having missed so much. In terms of our program engagement, all staff acknowledged that it will entail significant work to reengage clients and make up progress lost.

Young parents in our parenting programs felt they did not have time for engagement online, or did not want to engage online about issues relating to their children's health and wellbeing as they feared this would have implications in relation to child protection (e.g. they feared it would be recorded or there would be a more visible record of what they said). Some young mothers did not want to engage online as they live with a perpetrators of family violence and feared they would find out about them discussing issues with us.

- **Level of support.** Our program staff found that they had to help young people undertake their school work, search the internet for questions they might have relating to it and/or liaise with teachers to help explain some parts. We also had to support many parents of young people who were trying to help their children with work but becoming overwhelmed and anxious about their ability to assist them.

Referrals of children to our services from parents (and not schools) has also increased, especially of siblings of young people already engaged in the service whilst we are also working harder to support the needs of young people's families who have lost their jobs and require financial and other support.

Many young people did not want to ask teachers for help and the process has made some schools realise the size of the gap that some students have in learning and that the traditional approaches they employ are not helpful and instead are allowing them to slip through gaps (some schools ended up setting work online for the year below because of this). On the plus side, some clients found that they liked to do school work online due to spellcheck and said they would like to do school work online in the future.

- **Lack of suitable environment.** Too many of our clients do not have suitable home environments in which they could undertake their school and program work, and too many had issues of family violence and conflict to manage. Often the way they manage this is to leave the house and sometimes this resulted in them engaging in unconstructive activities with their friends.

Government economic responses to COVID-19

In response to the pandemic and the economic repercussions of lockdown, the Queensland Government developed its Economic Recovery Strategy (the Strategy).¹⁷ We particularly welcomed the \$20m for additional free training that was set aside for Queenslanders 'particularly young people and women who have borne a disproportionate burden through job losses nationally'.

We also supported emerging and expanding industry sectors, such as investment into renewable hydrogen in stage one and the renewable energy training facility in stage two, an area that requires investment if Queensland is to remain competitive in the energy sector and that is likely to attract and employ young Queenslanders.

As a member of the National Cabinet, we ask the Queensland Government to continue to exert influence over the continuation of key employment policy directions, which have helped support young people during this crisis. Notably, the Jobkeeper payments and Economic Support Payments, which included those eligible for Youth Allowances. If these measures cease abruptly, it is expected that more young people will become unemployed, while those currently looking for work will struggle to manage living expenses on much lower welfare payments and with the

¹⁷ <https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/our-economic-recovery-strategy>

prospect of securing a job anytime soon much less likely. **A more considered and tapered approach is required to transitioning young people off the payments** when and if, they return to their pre-COVID-19 levels of employment, taking into account any ‘under-employment’ impacts for returning staff.

A national employment strategy is required for young people, that sets out specific supports that both respond to employment impacts of the pandemic and create jobs in growing industries and markets. This should include youth specific training, job creation and appropriate employment services. Employment services need to be urgently overhauled if they are to meet the rising needs of unemployed young people, and particularly of long-term unemployed young people (we have set current issues with jobactive in our submission to the Senate’s Select Committee’s inquiry into COVID-19 and can share this with the Committee upon request).

As we previously mentioned, little support has been delivered by the state or Australian governments to overcome the digital divide that young disadvantaged cohorts of children and young people face in seeking to continue their engagement with education, training or employment programs during the pandemic.

yourtown solutions to youth unemployment

In addition to the employment programs we deliver, such as Skilling Queenslander For Work and Get Set For Work, to help young people overcome the barriers to employment, **yourtown** has developed two models to improve employment outcomes: 1) social enterprises, and 2) your job, your way. We briefly set the features of these models out below.

- **yourtown social enterprises**

Social enterprises have been a key component of **yourtown’s** holistic strategy to help support disadvantaged young people into work.¹⁸ They commenced over 20 years ago following our first fencing contract award for four young people with the Queensland Government, a social procurement contract that still exists and continues to grow with the support of QBuild.¹⁹ Today, our social enterprises employ up to 80 young people across four states.

We set up our social enterprises to provide paid transitional work and training for unemployed young people with complex challenges as a staged, stepping stone to open employment. They deliver fee-for-service work for government, corporate, and non-profit sector customers in construction, parks and asset maintenance, graffiti removal, horticulture, landscaping and mowing. Since 2000, we have provided over 3,000 young women and men experiencing unemployment across Australia with paid work and training.

yourtown’s social enterprises are certified by Social Traders and in 2019, were recognised by them as the Large Social Enterprise of the Year. Our social enterprises operate in a competitive market but our customers generate social and economic benefits beyond the value of procured services

¹⁸ **yourtown’s** video on celebrating 20 years of delivering social enterprises can be accessed here: <https://vimeo.com/429783256/098763a279>

¹⁹ <https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/qbuild-and-yourtown>

including a strong commitment to sustainable local communities through providing entry level jobs for local young people and meeting diversity employment targets.

Furthermore, our social enterprises have been found to deliver a social return on investment of \$3.50 for every \$1 invested.²⁰ Their broader benefits include reduced unemployment among young people experiencing disadvantage, decreased welfare dependency over the course of the life time, local employer-led training and skills development, and reduced crime and anti-social behaviour.

Research and evaluation we have undertaken with our social enterprise clients about their experiences and their outcomes of them have demonstrated a range of different positive results from involvement with the programs, including improved self-esteem and confidence, day-to-day structure and purpose, professional, soft and other life skills, and ultimately paid work experience that is more likely to lead to paid work.²¹

We see social procurement through contracting social enterprises such as ours, in conjunction with setting specific quotas for youth unemployment in social contracts, as vital to the Queensland Government's role in supporting young people through this economic crisis. This approach has proven to be successful, evidenced by our long-standing and effective relationship with the Queensland Government. There are also many obvious ways in which the Queensland Government could incorporate social procurement contracts targeting young people in its economic stimulus packages, including through allocating some of the \$100m social housing construction program it has recently announced and of infrastructure projects (e.g. such as bicycle lane construction) to social enterprises supporting young people.

- **your job, your way**

Long-term unemployed young people deal with a range of highly complex and multifaceted issues, unlike those who are in short-term unemployment, which can increase their risk of social exclusion and permanent detachment from the labour market. These barriers and their consequences are compounded as time spent in unemployment is prolonged, further impeding their opportunities in acquiring long-term sustainable work. However, current difficulties in accessing suitable longitudinal data for young people means there is a lack of specific research in how to best support these young people and tackle this ongoing issue. Furthermore, rigorous evaluations of current responses to alleviate long-term youth unemployment are scant.

To help address this gap in knowledge, **yourtown** undertook a survey of nearly 300 young people in long-term unemployment across Australia. Through this research, young people told us that the following issues prevented them from finding employment:

- Educational - such as low levels of formal schooling, literacy and numeracy
- Vocational - such as limited work history and low work skills
- Contextual - such as intergenerational unemployment and living in low socio-economic areas

²⁰ Based on an analysis of **yourtown**'s NSW Graffiti Removal Enterprise.

²¹ Bartlett, B. J., Dalglish, J. R., & Mafi, S. C. (2012). Reconnecting disaffected youth through successful transition to work project. Brisbane: yourtown.

- Practical - such as not having a driver's licence and limited access to support through social/familial networks or services
- Psycho-social - such as mental health concerns, substance use, and homelessness
- Cognitive-motivational - such as low self-esteem and poor decision-making skills; and
- Anti-social - such as offending history and poor anger management

A diverse group with diverse needs

Our survey also showed that young people in long-term unemployment are not a homogenous group and different youth cohorts have varying experiences of long-term unemployment – critical insight when developing effective interventions. For example, young men, who have a higher rate of long-term youth unemployment than their female counterparts, told us that not having a driver's licence, limited transport, low literacy and numeracy, anger management issues, unstable accommodation, and offending history were more important barriers to employment. Young women, on the other hand, told us that they more often experience a lack of available jobs, low self-esteem and mental health issues as employment barriers.

First Australian young people ranked a lack of qualifications as the main barrier to employment, whilst young people with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds rated difficulties in accessing social and institutional support due to their residency or citizenship status as a principal work barrier. The top issue for young people in regional and remote areas was the lack of jobs, whereas young people in metropolitan cities were more likely to view limited work experience, low work skills, and having no car as barriers to employment.

A new model of support that is working to get young people into jobs

Given this cohort's complex needs, it became increasingly clear that existing caseload sizes in jobactive do not provide our consultants with the time required to develop the rapport and trust necessary to work with these clients, to comprehensively understand their individual needs, strengths and interests, or to develop a detailed plan of action in collaboration with other service providers, including post-employment strategies targeting ongoing capability development.

We therefore used our research with young people alongside other existing research into tackling youth unemployment to develop a model for support services to effectively assist long-term unemployed young people to engage in sustainable employment. Named **your job, your way**, it is designed to meet a range of different needs throughout the life of a long-term unemployed young person's journey into work. In addition, it recognises that long-term unemployment is a barrier to finding work itself and compounds existing issues that prevent job obtainment.

your job your way targets young people aged 16-21 who have been unemployed for over 52 weeks, and are at high risk of social exclusion and permanent detachment from the labour market. Central to its approach is the delivery of intensive, concurrent services and support to small active caseloads of around 25 young people. This is achieved through the provision of a dual support team of a qualified case manager (pathways coach) and an employment mentor – both of whom have been recruited for their knowledge and skills in identifying and working with people with mental health issues – who work with the young person using a collaborative strengths-based, trauma-

informed approach, coupled with targeted employer engagement and intensive 'in work' mentoring to 26 weeks.

We are currently funding two pilots of the model in Elizabeth in South Australia and Caboolture in Queensland and a third site is being funded by the Australian Government's Try, Test and Learn initiative in Davenport-Burnie in Tasmania – three areas of high disadvantage and high rates of long-term youth unemployment. The model is being also being independently evaluated by the Centre for Social Impact (University of New South Wales) to ensure that the effectiveness and impact of these pilots on young people and the community is thoroughly tested and measured.

In the interim evaluation report, it has been found that, despite the model's approach focusing on addressing barriers to employment before prioritising placing a client into employment, a higher proportion of **your job your way** clients have found jobs (i.e. had a placement) between July 2018 and June 2019 compared to jobactive clients of the same cohort: 51% of your job your way clients compared to only 33% of jobactive clients. Compared to jobactive clients, your job your way clients were also more successful at attaining 4-, 12-, and in some sites 26-weeks outcomes also. For example, the placement conversion rate to 12 weeks outcome was 79% for your job your way clients compared to 61% for jobactive clients.

Helping young people into work: what needs to change

Given the scale of the economic downturn, which the current employment service is ill-equipped to accommodate, **we call for the development of a national, cross-cutting investment strategy to address youth unemployment and long-term youth unemployment**, that includes both supply and demand policy approaches, and short and long term policies, as set out in our recommendations below. We see this crisis as an opportunity to address many long-standing issues that have prevented all young people from reaching their potential and contributing in ways they would like to society.

- **Recommendations**

Recommendation 1. That the Queensland Government works with the National Cabinet to develop a national investment strategy to address youth unemployment and long-term youth unemployment that includes:

- **Youth specialist employment services** to reflect the different needs and engagement preferences of those aged 15-24, centred on the delivery of intensive and face-to-face support to small, active caseloads of jobseekers. This model should recognise that long-term unemployment is a barrier to work in itself, alongside the need to address the multifaceted issues that prevent young people from finding work including mental ill-health and low self-esteem.
- **Place-based employment response models** for priority high unemployment areas so that local solutions can be developed to the local context, such as your job, your way that has been proven to improve outcomes for long-term unemployed young people, and

collective impact strategies like those being led and developed by the NYEB.

- Government and large employers should set **social procurement targets** to stimulate job creation and growth of social enterprises, particularly in low socio-economic areas, with **specific quotas for youth employment**. Portions of new infrastructure, social housing, green and circular economy projects would be optimal areas with which to commence.
- **A specific strategy to address the 'pink collar' recession** to include new and continuing support to industries most affected by lockdown and the immediate effects of the economic downturn. Infrastructure and construction investment is important but more sectors need to be supported in innovative ways to help young women back into the workforce.
- **More structured support** for school to work transitions for students **who are disengaged or at high risk of disengaging early from education**. This would involve providers being able to engage with at risk young people while they are still at school.
- **Practical solutions to address young peoples' transport issues**, including the problem of accessing a vehicle and accumulating sufficient practice hours to sit for their licence.
- Acknowledgement and **response to the increasing casualisation** of the workforce, including some level of security and stability built into the system so that vulnerable cohorts cannot be left to fall through the gaps again.
- **A reinvigorated TAFE sector** that provides quality and accredited training that leads to employment and is tailored to the local needs of employers.
- **Continued adequate youth unemployment payments**, required to ensure that economic hardship does not compound the barriers to work and so young people can appropriately focus on their job search or training. This should include consideration of the impact of Jobkeeper on young people and how its cessation will affect them so that appropriate support for industry and individuals is in place and the economy does not further deteriorate.

Recommendation 2: Educate students about employers' expectations, the local labour market and how to find work and connect them with employment support services in school to help minimise periods of unemployment. Schools should work closer with the local community, including local employers, training providers and employment support providers (e.g. jobactive) and invite them into school to help prepare students for their post-school transition.

Recommendation 3: That the Queensland Government works with the Australian, state and territory governments to develop national strategies to ensure that no child or young person is unable to access appropriate devices to undertake their school work or training, or find work, or access free unlimited internet access if they do not have the resources to afford them.

Recommendation 4. Review the school curriculum in relation to digital learning at school to ensure that it accommodates the needs of vulnerable students.