

Intergenerational Welfare Dependence

A submission to the:
Select Committee

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Introduction

Increasingly research is looking at intergenerational disadvantage and ways to break its cycle and improve life outcomes for those affected by it.¹ Given its complexity, that it has no quick fix and that the income inequality gap in Australia is continuing to widen and set to compound disadvantage, we strongly welcome the establishment of this Select Committee.² Australian governments must seek to uncover the roots of deep and persistent disadvantage so that children are not constrained by the same issues as their parents and instead are equipped with the skills and support to fulfil their potential in life.

We recommend that the Committee's work centres on barriers and facilitators to breaking cycles of intergenerational *disadvantage*, rather than welfare dependence. We believe that the most effective way to reduce dependence on welfare is to tackle the underlying causes of disadvantage. Framing the Committee's work around the concept of welfare dependence deflects the debate from the important issues, and risks creating an unintended focus on quick fix efforts to move vulnerable parents into employment, which may have a short term effect, but will not effectively reduce intergenerational disadvantage in the long term.

yourtown works with many children and families for whom intergenerational disadvantage is a reality. For example, many of our clients accessing our educational engagement programs have parents who did not finish school or did not achieve a school or vocational qualification. Many of our clients accessing our employment support programs have parents who have never worked or who are unemployed, whilst many of our clients accessing our parenting support programs were born to teenage or young adult parents themselves.

What's more, many of our clients and their parents will be affected by a range of different areas of disadvantage. Indeed, beneath the transmission of educational, employment, parental and health outcomes lies a number of complex and interrelated social, economic, health and environmental issues that mutually reinforce disadvantage, affecting children, families and communities in different ways and degrees, but ultimately leading to cycles of reduced life outcomes for present and future generations.³

The complexity and interdependence of factors relating to intergenerational disadvantage underlie its persistence. However, thanks to emerging research and our own experience and research, **yourtown** has identified a number of broad approaches and principles to working with children, families and communities that produce positive results and provide a start pointing for policy development. In our submission, we present an overview of these approaches and principles using some examples of our programs that apply them and which cover areas such deep and persistent areas of disadvantage such as unemployment, homelessness and youth offending. These approaches/principles include:

- Whole family approach
- Early intervention
- Importance of education
- Relationship-based, holistic and intensive case management support

¹ E.g. <https://www.lifecoursecentre.org.au/>

² https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2018/09/young-australians-prospects-still-come-grow/?utm_source=Pro+Bono+Australia+-+email+updates&utm_campaign=9164bla472-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_08_18_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_5ee68172fb-9164bla472-147113497&mc_cid=9164bla472&mc_eid=a46eb0f8e1

³ E.g. Cheng, T.L, Johnson, S.B, and Goodman, E. (2018) *Breaking the Intergenerational Cycle of Disadvantage: The Three Generation Approach*. Pediatrics, Volume 137, number 6, June 2016

- Culturally appropriate solutions designed and led by Indigenous communities
- A whole of government approach and collaborative working between stakeholders

About **yourtown**

yourtown is a national organisation and registered charity that aims to tackle the issues affecting the lives of young people. Established in 1961, **yourtown's** Mission is to enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life.

yourtown provides a range of face-face and virtual services to 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 educational programs and social enterprises, which support young people to re-engage with education and/or employment, including programs for youth offenders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services
- Accommodation responses to young parents with children who experience homelessness and women and children seeking refuge from domestic and family violence
- Young Parent Programs offering case work, individual and group work support and child development programs for young parents and their children
- Parentline, a telephone counselling service for parents and carers'
- Expressive Therapy interventions for young children and infants who have experienced trauma and abuse or been exposed to violence.

Effective approaches to disrupting cycles of disadvantage

As a multifaceted and complex problem, we know that there is no one intervention, approach or principle that will alleviate intergenerational disadvantage. To disrupt cycles of disadvantage, a combination of different universal and targeted interventions accommodating children, families and communities and tailored to a range of needs are required.

These interventions must be underpinned by long-term, whole of family and early intervention approaches, directed by trauma-informed and relationship-based practice and be embedded in a system of services that complement each other and are capable of effectively working together to address and support needs holistically throughout the life course.

Finally, this system must be supported by long-term, political and policy commitment to sustained and appropriate levels of funding and to maintain momentum and focus. Without this commitment, Australia is unlikely to ever make significant progress in changing the lives of our most vulnerable children, families and their future generations.

Below, we present some of the key elements that we believe must characterise services delivering support to Australia's most disadvantaged as part of a system to disrupt deep and persistent disadvantage.

- **Whole family approach**

The whole family approach, or the two or three generational approach, is widely acknowledged as being critical to disrupting deep and persistent disadvantage.⁴ This approach acknowledges the importance of nurturing parental relationships to early child development. The absence of these relationships paired with poverty and related stress, often leaves children ill-adapted to confront key life milestones, negatively affecting their long-term social, educational, economic and health and wellbeing outcomes.⁵

The importance of parents

There is universal acceptance of the importance of parenting on childhood development. Parents are not only a child's first teacher, they are also their first caregiver. Parents play a significant role in shaping the person the child will become and the opportunities in life the child will have,⁶ and although parents can influence child development through the resources and cognitive stimulation they offer, the impact of their attachment or bond with their children is fundamental to their flourishing.⁷

Secure attachment in the early years positively impacts on a child's later development and life chances, with insecure attachment negatively affecting educational attainment as well as social and emotional development. Parents who are living in poverty, have mental health problems or are young are most likely to struggle with parenting and attachment. Good parenting can protect children growing up in disadvantaged settings,⁸ accentuating the need for early interventions with high-risk or troubled families that support parenting attachment and responsive care.⁹ Secure attachment helps children thrive by

⁴ E.g. The Aspen Institute and the Bernard Leer Foundation (2016) *Breaking the cycle of poverty: whole family approach*: https://bernardvanleer.org/app/uploads/2016/09/Breaking_the_Cycle_Framework_AspenAscend_BernardvanLeer.pdf

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Duncan, G., & Murnane, R. e. (2011). *Wither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools and Children's Life Chances*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

⁷ Bowlby, J. (1979). *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London: Routledge.

⁸ Gutman, L. M., & Feinstein, L. (2010). Parenting behaviours and children's development from infancy to early childhood: changes, continuities and contributions. *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(4), 535-556.

⁹ Moulin, S., Waldfogel, J., & Washbrook, E. (2014). *Baby Bonds: Parenting, attachment and a secure base for children*: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/baby-bonds-final.pdf>

learning to manage their own feelings and behaviour, improving their confidence, resilience and self-reliance.

Most parents want the best for their child, with evidence that having children can be the catalyst for social mobility.¹⁰ However, it is evident that families that live in poverty face more challenges in meeting the needs of their children.¹¹ Stigmatisation, lack of access to resources and social support are key issues that need to be addressed to enhance the lives of these vulnerable families.¹²

The current evidence base on parent help seeking is scarce, with no national data to inform the development of early interventions for family support. However, research commissioned by the Queensland Family and Child Commission suggests that parents are not good at asking for help.¹³ The report identified that parents are stressed and worried about their ability to keep their children healthy and safe. Many also worry that by asking for help they will be judged negatively and perceived to be struggling.

Assisting parents to navigate the 'procedural madness' of service support systems through normal, non-stigmatising, universal settings such as schools is seen as an effective strategy.¹⁴ The success of engagement with vulnerable families lies in the relationship skills of the practitioner to respond to the complexity and uncertainty of these families' lives.¹⁵ With client trust, confidentiality and control identified as important factors influencing help-seeker choice, the importance of working with rather than doing things to families is paramount to successful partnerships and service engagement.¹⁶

The importance of wider support

In addition, the whole family approach also recognises that child development is influenced by access to appropriate community services and a positive wider environment. Indeed, recent research shows that to improve their life chances, children and young people in disadvantaged communities need to have access to the same 'opportunity structures' – 'a combination of physical facilities, institutional support and social networks' – that exist within more affluent communities. Crucially, this research found that in comparison to children in disadvantaged communities, the children of low-income families in more affluent suburbs had higher aspirations and knew what they needed to do to achieve them. That is, they benefited by learning from and simulating the behaviour and activities of others around them in the environment, and like their more affluent peers, developed the skillset to take advantage of available opportunities.¹⁷

The whole family approach is therefore built around the idea that all factors affecting the family will impact child development in addition to the direct experiences of the child, and that the context and outcomes of a child, their family and their community are mutually reinforcing, be that positively or negatively.¹⁸

¹⁰ Freeman, A. L. (2017). Moving "Up and Out" Together: Exploring the Mother-Child Bond in Low-Income, Single-Mother-Headed Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79(3), 675-689.

¹¹ McArthur, M., Thomson, L., Winkworth, G., & Butler, K. (2010). *Families' experiences of services*. FaHCSIA Occasional Paper No. 30: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1700846>

¹² McArthur, M., & Winkworth, G. (2013). The hopes and dreams of Australian young mothers in receipt of income support. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 7(1), 47-62.

¹³ Ipsos. (2016). Talking Families Campaign: Detailed findings and technical report: <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/talking-families-research-report#Research-report>

¹⁴ McArthur, M., Thomson, L., Winkworth, G., & Butler, K. (2010). *Families' experiences of services*. FaHCSIA Occasional Paper No. 30: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1700846>

¹⁵ Barrett, H. (2008). *'Hard to reach' families : engagement in the voluntary and community sector*. London: Family and Parenting Institute.

¹⁶ Featherstone, B., & Broadhurst, K. (2003). Engaging parents and carers with family support services: What can be learned from research on help-seeking? *Child & Family Social Work*, 8(4), 341-350.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

Whole of family approach: tackling family homelessness

yourtown delivers a unique service to one of the most vulnerable population groups in our communities: young parents aged 25 years or younger - often single mothers - and their children who are experiencing homelessness. San Miguel provides long-term support and although we seek to have helped a family transition to independence as soon as possible and ideally within 12 months, we will support them for as long as necessary.

They are parents with new babies and young children, many of whom had to deal with issues such as family violence, drug and alcohol dependence and economic hardship, and who often have been placed in out of home care. However, the out of home care system is not well equipped to support young parents and their babies meaning these young parents have nowhere to go and their infants are at risk of being taken into care, perpetuating the cycle. Hence, many residents at San Miguel have been forced to leave care on becoming pregnant and we thereby fill a huge support gap to these families, providing support in two key ways.

Firstly, we resolve the immediate housing issue and provide safe accommodation and in doing so alleviate immediate stress. This then enables us to, secondly; work with these young parents and their children to help build their parenting and life skills (often lacking for all young people leaving out of home care); provide appropriate child development education and activities; therapeutically address any trauma experienced by parents and children as well as any additional issues that may have contributed to their homelessness (e.g. alcohol and drugs misuse) and; divert families to take part in community-based social and educational activities.

The goal of San Miguel is to create an environment in which young families can develop the skills needed to live independently and to raise children whose future will be very different to their parents. To this end, our approach to the delivery of therapeutic and educational programs at San Miguel is flexible, person-centre and holistic. For example, parents often need nutrition and cooking education and given their young age and previous family experiences, this education has to be tailored to a range of needs, including extremely basic needs.

In addition, San Miguel is well-resourced with both staff and facilities. A Senior Parenting and Child Development Worker provides specialist support to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents, a Child Development Worker works with children and parents to support children to achieve key child development milestones, a Families Case Worker supports parents to achieve life goals and personal development, and an Outreach Case Worker assists the family to transition back into the community through nurturing links to community services and support services.

In terms of facilities, the 19 hectare site includes a purpose-built community room for social activities such as movie nights and other events, a tennis court, swimming pool, community garden and fenced paddocks. We also provide transport so that our work with and referral to external services is easily supported. Collaborative work with a diverse range of external organisations not only ensures a robust, holistic response but also helps to ensure that on leaving San Miguel families have a support network within the community and are able to access the services they require over the long-term.

- **Early intervention**

A wealth of evidence today highlights the value of early intervention in place of acute support in relation to not only preventing negative life outcomes and cycles but also to reducing costs in service provision.¹⁹ However, we also know that government policy and service provision is still skewed to providing costly crisis support as effective early intervention is no easy task and requires long-term planning, collaboration and considerable upfront investment.

Below, we draw from our own experience in working with young offenders,²⁰ and set out some key factors that we feel are crucial to effective early intervention in this area and to thereby preventing cycles of offending within families.

Early intervention: youth offending

Research on pathways to crime has shown that conduct problems in childhood, evident as young as preschool and the early primary years, predict later aggressive and delinquent behaviour.²¹ Moreover, the vast majority of children and young people who commit offences are among Australia's most disadvantaged. In their young lives, many will have been confronted by a range of deeply complex, persistent and interrelated social issues, a fact explaining the startling, continuing and increasing overrepresentation of Indigenous children and young people within our youth justice systems.

Many risk factors for offending are statistical markers for family traits associated with socio-economic disadvantage, for example parental or sibling offending history, family violence, low parental educational attainment or employment, parental use of drugs and alcohol, poor child-rearing practices, neglect or abuse, and poverty.²² Hence, young offenders will, for example: have had contact with child safety services; have parents who have been in prison or use drugs and/or alcohol; be unemployed and/or homeless; live in an unstable family environment. We also know that, if left unaddressed, that there is a high chance that these issues will become intergenerational and today's young offenders will become the parents of young offenders in the future.

Given our experience in working with young offenders, we have identified four key factors that we believe are important in delivering early intervention support to children who may be at risk of offending and their families.

1. **Universal and comprehensive assessments of children** as early as possible, and regularly throughout a child's school career, to identify and monitor those at risk of offending. We know that even primary school staff are able to identify students who are having problems that are likely to develop into severe behavioural problems, school disengagement and criminal activity later in their young lives. In Victoria, schools are encouraged to use available data and information to identify children at risk of disengaging.²³ We believe that youth justice systems could take a similar approach to identifying children at risk of offending, using an assessment of all children at primary school and

¹⁹ Find ref

²⁰ **yourtown** has a wealth of experience working with youth offenders through both delivering direct youth offending services, and other targeted services including employment, homelessness and education services which a significant proportion of young offenders access

²¹ Farrington, D.P. (1991). Antisocial personality from childhood to adulthood. *The Psychologist*, 4, 389-394 and Stevenson, J. & Goodman, R. (2001). Association between behaviour at age three years and adult criminality. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 179(3), 197-202.

²² Armytage, P. and Ogloff, J. (2017) *Youth Justice Review and Strategy*. Victorian Government:

https://assets.justice.vic.gov.au/justice/resources/c92af2a1-89eb-4c8f-8a56-3acf78505a3a/report_meeting_needs_and_reducing_offending_executive_summary_2017.pdf

and Farrington D.P. (2003) Key Results from the First Forty Years of the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. In: Taking Stock of Delinquency. Longitudinal Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Series. Springer, Boston, MA

²³ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/disengagedrisk.aspx>

triangulating additional information and data they have to develop an at-risk cohort that can become a focus of targeted support.

The Geelong Project in Victoria provides an excellent example of the use of holistic assessment to identify children at risk in order to provide them with appropriate support targeted to their individual needs, hence improving educational and wellbeing outcomes.²⁴ This includes outcomes directly and indirectly related to youth offending, demonstrating how an investment into robust assessments would help government and agencies intervene early to prevent the emergence of and deal with a number of different issues that confront disadvantaged children and prevent them from leading living healthy and prosperous lives.

2. **Holistic, flexible and person-centred support services** that collaborate to provide targeted child and family interventions that address multiple risk and protective factors.

We believe that there is little point providing services to the child alone, as a child will still return home to a volatile and disruptive environment that will halt or hinder his/her progress. Services must work with a child's family – through providing parenting and life skills education and addressing significant issues such as drug and alcohol use that may affect parents. Evidence shows that it is the cumulative number and combination of risk factors that most strongly predicts offending, hence interventions targeting a single factor are unlikely to be effective.²⁵

3. **Trauma-informed practice** should be a core aspect of any service dealing with at risk children and young people. A significant body of research shows that (a) youth involved in the justice system have high rates of exposure to trauma, often from early in life, and often across multiple different contexts,²⁶ and (b) trauma and chronic stress can have long lasting effects on brain development, which can contribute to antisocial behaviour and offending in later life.

Experience of trauma and neglect at an early age is associated with poor emotional regulation and impulse control, learning and behavioural difficulties at school, mental health problems, risky behaviour and later offending.²⁷ In our experience, in the absence of formal support this negative pathway can be inadvertently strengthened by inappropriate responses from families and schools. For example, our staff are aware of parents medicating their children, who may be hyperactive, have poor attention spans or display other challenging behaviour, with cannabis. In addition, a significant proportion of our clients who have youth offending history advise that they have been 'diagnosed' with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) yet have never been assessed or consulted appropriate professional staff. We fear that children displaying problematic behaviour at school are labelled ADHD (without any follow-up care), when in fact a history of untreated, complex trauma is likely to be responsible for their behaviour.

4. **Relationship-building.** We know that relationships are central to working with vulnerable groups and again any service must consider how it works with children and their families to develop mutual respect and trust. For young offenders, they will often have been let down by and lost faith in the relationships they have with adults and do not know their potential value. Therefore, all children

²⁴ <http://www.thegeelongproject.com.au/>

²⁵ Homel R, Cashmore J, Gilmore L, Goodnow J, Hayes A, Lawrence J, Leech M, O'Connor I, Vinson T, Najman J & Western J. (1999). *Pathways to prevention: developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department

²⁶ E.g. Dierkhising, C. B., Ko, S. J., Woods-Jaeger, B., Briggs, E. C., Lee, R., & Pynoos, R. S. (2013). Trauma histories among justice-involved youth: findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 4, 0.3402/ejpt.v4i0.20274

²⁷ Cook, A., Spinazzola, J., Ford, J., Lanktree, C., Blaustein, M., Cloitre, M., DeRosa, R., Hubbard, R., Kagan, R., & Liautaud, J., Mallah, K., Olafson, E., & van der Kolk, B. (2005). Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents. *Psychiatric Annals*. 35. 390-398.

must have the opportunity to develop respectful relationships with adults be that at home, school or the wider community and it should be the aim of early intervention to develop this trust early on to help them learn that there are adults are on their side.

To this end, it would be useful to have a **key worker for an at risk child and their family** to facilitate both the development of trust and coordination of different services and staff, including between school staff and children and families. The key worker would be responsible for planning and coordinating the child and family's support and monitoring their progress and outcomes. Having an assigned key worker would help all stakeholders share information and know who to contact. The aim of their role would be to build support services around the child's and family's needs and help them to overcome the challenges of navigating complex and disjointed services, as well as to advocate for them when their needs are not met or new challenges and hurdles arise be that at school, home or in their community.

- **Importance of education**

When families are experiencing multifaceted disadvantage - such as financial hardship, poor housing/overcrowding or homelessness, family conflict or dysfunction, mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse - children's school attendance and education is likely to suffer.²⁸ Indeed, disadvantaged students are significantly behind in reading and maths, Year 12 completion rates are nearly 20% lower than for students from high SES backgrounds and university students from high SES backgrounds are three times more likely to attend than students from low SES backgrounds.²⁹

Research findings also overwhelmingly demonstrate that poor educational outcomes lead to poor employment outcomes, whilst financial hardship induces stress and significantly impacts on people's ability to function well in other areas of life. Conversely, higher educational attainment results in improved employment and therefore economic outcomes for an individual, a family and a community.³⁰ We therefore believe that ensuring children have the right support to effectively engage with their school and education is crucial. Below, we set out our learning from delivering school engagement programs.

Early intervention: school (re) engagement

yourtown has long delivered programs to help children and young people (re)engage with school and today we deliver Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) in South Australia and the Youth Engagement Program (YEP) in Queensland. In working with this cohort of children and young people, we have understood the value of relationship-building to their progress. Hence, investing in developing and nurturing relationships between our clients and our staff, their families and their schools to build mutual trust and respect underpins our work. In addition, through our programs, we have identified and undertaken research to identify other key factors of successful school engagement.

As is the case for many negative life outcomes, there is a long list of risk factors for early school leaving, including: poor school attendance, behaviour and grades; low SES; minority status; child abuse and neglect; family violence; household stress or poor family functioning; conflict between home and school culture; learning difficulties and disability (including behavioural, emotional and intellectual); poor mental

²⁸ The Smith Family: <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/poverty-in-australia>

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

health; and risky behaviour (e.g., smoking, misuse of drugs or alcohol).³¹ The usefulness of risk factors for predicting early school leaving is, however, limited as early school leavers are not a homogenous group.³²

Indeed, every student who leaves school early has followed a different disengagement pathway, reflecting the complexity of their personal circumstances and the web of socio-economic disadvantage that confronts them. Consequently, we know that there is no single intervention suitable for all students.

Research tells us that the key to school completion is engagement with education, which is generally considered to consist of three aspects:

- emotional engagement (e.g., sense of belonging at school)
- cognitive engagement (e.g., interest in learning)
- behavioural engagement (e.g., attendance, behaviour in class).

Critical to understanding and enhancing engagement is recognition that engagement with education is not an attribute of the student. Engagement is an alterable variable that is highly influenced by policies and practices of the school and its teachers, as well as by family, peer and community influences. Hence, interventions that aim to improve student engagement with school must not simply focus on 'improving' a child or young person but jointly seek to review and improve school and staff policies and practices to better meet the child's needs also.

Although robust evidence of what works is lacking, from our experience and research it is possible to conclude that effective programs for students who have left or are at risk of leaving school early do the following:

- target engagement, not merely attendance
- start early
- strengthen relationships between students and school staff
- work in partnership with school
- engage families
- provide intensive, long term, individualised, holistic support for both academic and personal issues
- are strengths-based
- are tailored to the local context (school and community)
- are framed by a gradual planned reintegration into mainstream school.

In addition to the factors influencing engagement for non-Indigenous Australian students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are affected by racism and racially-based bullying, lack of cultural inclusion in schools, and mistrust of education as a result of past and present experiences and past and present government policy. In addition to the issues common to all students, effective programs for First Australian students need to find ways to address these issues, build trust between schools and Indigenous Australian young people and families, and support them to develop a sense of belonging to their school.

³¹ Balfanz, Robert, Liza Herzog, and Douglas J. Mac Iver. 'Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions'. *Educational Psychologist* 42, no. 4 (2 November 2007): 223-35; Barker, Brittany, Thomas Kerr, Huiru Dong, Evan Wood, and Kora DeBeck. 'High School Incompletion and Childhood Maltreatment among Street-Involved Young People in Vancouver, Canada'. *Health & Social Care in the Community* 25, no. 2 (March 2017): 378-84; Fortin, Laurier, Diane Marcotte, Pierre Potvin, Egide Royer, and Jacques Joly. 'Typology of Students at Risk of Dropping out of School: Description by Personal, Family and School Factors'. *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 21, no. 4 (2006): 363; Hawkins, Robert L., James Jaccard, and Elana Needle. 'Nonacademic Factors Associated with Dropping out of High School: Adolescent Problem Behaviors'. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 4, no. 2 (January 2013): 58-75

³² Glogowski, Konrad (2015). 'What Works in Dropout Prevention: Research Evidence, Pathways to Education Program Design, and Practitioner Knowledge'. Pathways to Education Canada.

- **Relationship-based, holistic and intensive case management support**

The success of all the services we provide is underpinned by our staff's ability to develop relationships built on mutual trust and respect with our young clients. Disadvantaged children and young people often will not have a healthy relationship with an adult or have reasons to mistrust adults, and all services supporting vulnerable children and young people need to show this cohort that they believe in them, and are there to help.

Staff need appropriate time to earn this trust and we consider an intensive case management approach to be an effective way to help nurture a relationship between a client and staff member, so that staff have the opportunity to uncover all the complex issues that confront a young person. Through fully understanding their circumstances and needs, our staff can then coordinate a range of different services, both internal and external, to address the multifaceted and interrelated issues they face.

We identified the need for this approach in our delivery of employment services to long-term unemployed young people and have developed a model, which we are currently piloting and rigorously evaluating. We set out the details of this model below.

Relationship-based intensive case management – tackling long-term youth unemployment

Increasing numbers of young people are experiencing long-term unemployment. Long-term youth unemployment is defined as young people aged between 15 and 24 years who have been unsuccessful in securing work for any period longer than two weeks, for at least one year. In 2006-07 over 44,000 young people were in long-term unemployment. This rose to over 51,000 young people in 2016-17.

yourtown works with more than 7% of these young people through our employment support programs. Subsequently, we have an extensive knowledge of the barriers young people face when trying to access sustainable work as well of the enduring detrimental impact that long-term unemployment can have on young lives.

What we know

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
- 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

Given this cohort's complex needs, it became increasingly clear to our jobactive staff 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 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 pilots of the model in Elizabeth in South Australia and Caboolture in Queensland – two areas of high disadvantage and high rates of long-term youth unemployment. **yourn town** is also funding the Centre for Social Impact (University of New South Wales) to provide an independent evaluation of these pilots to ensure that the effectiveness and impact of these pilots on young people and the community is thoroughly tested and measured. We are confident that we will be able to share some positive results showing how intensive relationship-based approaches can effectively transition Australia's most disadvantaged job seekers into sustainable employment in the near future.

- **Culturally appropriate solutions designed and led by Indigenous communities**

We know that efforts to ‘close the gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations on a number of different outcomes are meeting with limited success, and indeed that key targets to reduce the gap on school attendance and halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018 have not been met, whilst the target to halve the gap in employment by 2020 and reduce life expectancy by 2031 are not on track to be met.³³

Following the ten year review of Closing the Gap, one of the key lessons government says it has learned is that ‘effective programs and services need to be designed, developed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’.³⁴ We strongly agree and would add that policy-makers must be willing to empower Indigenous people to take the lead in designing solutions. It is not enough that Indigenous consultation is an ‘after-thought’ or an add-on, First Australian leadership and views must be inherently intertwined in and central to the strategic planning, policy and service delivery of services that seek to support disadvantaged children and young people.

Community-led interventions are particularly important for Indigenous groups as they have the ability to overcome the significant access barrier of trust that First Australian people experience when interacting with formal services and agencies, and instead can instil not just a sense of, but real ownership.³⁵ Yet today, we know that – in some areas Indigenous-led interventions for school (re) engagement for youth offenders for example – are simply not being delivered due to funding shortages.

Facilitating Indigenous policy and intervention design will not only result in the development of services that more appropriately and sustainably meet their needs, but will also help to enhance and restore First Australian cultural and social agency lost due to historical events.

Indigenous solutions: a work engagement model

In collaboration with Marumali Consultations and Relative Creative and informed through yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples working at the construction of the Parklands Project, Gold Coast, **yourtown** developed the First Australian’s Work Engagement Model ©yourtown.

The model was developed in recognition that although Indigenous Participation Plans (IPP) are designed to increase the amount and quality of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees and businesses participation within a construction project, when it comes to their implementation, things get skipped over, pared back, or forgotten. Sometimes key stakeholders for a project may not understand the role they need to play in supporting the IPP, which can influence the extent to which an organisation is able to have a truly inclusive workplace culture and foster the engagement and retention of First Australian employees and businesses. Sometimes the plan itself may not be fully understood, especially if a template is adopted from elsewhere.

We found that what is missing from the IPP space is a framework or theoretical understanding of what drives First Australians to want to work for an organisation and what makes for a good working experience for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. With this understanding, businesses can

³³ <https://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/executive-summary>

³⁴ <https://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/executive-summary>

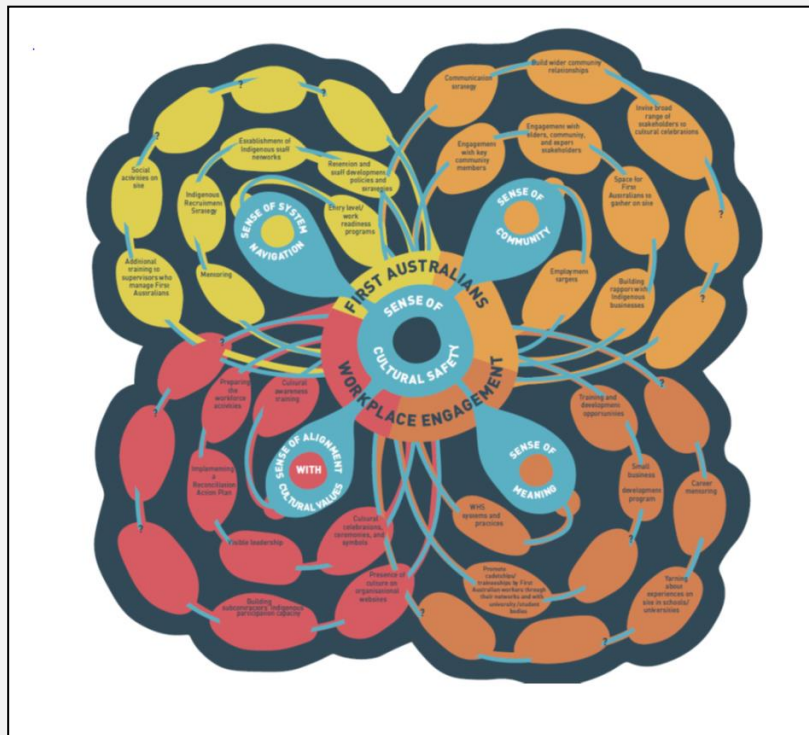
³⁵ Law Council of Australia, (2017) *The Justice Project: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Consultation Paper, 2017*: <https://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/files/web-pdf/Justice%20Project/Consultation%20Papers/Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Peoples.pdf>

connect their strategies to a clear purpose – research shows that purpose drives people to act and influences their discretionary effort. It may also suggest that new or alternate strategies may be useful to build the required foundations for First Australians' workplace engagement. Therefore, this model offers the beginnings of a culturally theoretical underpinning of IPPs.

The model explained

The First Australians' Work Engagement model depicts the factors identified as likely to facilitate First Australian's sense of work engagement. The factors are all interconnected, shown through the blue lines which represent ripples in water, or thread weaving the sense of cultural safety through the other senses.

The First Australians' Workplace Engagement, seen in the yellow, reds and oranges, represents that if the blue continues weaving, work engagement will weave back. This 'ripple effect' reflects that which can occur through investing in Indigenous participation initiatives. The colours of this model are inspired by the colours of the Parklands Project itself which seemed fitting as this project has led to so many Indigenous participation legacies. A sense of 'Cultural Safety' is viewed as the 'higher order' factor in this model, but the weaves do not flow in any particular direction as they are all interconnected.



- **A whole of government approach and collaborative working between stakeholders**

The complexity and interdependency of the challenges that confront disadvantaged children and young people means more effective collaboration between all stakeholders is critical. However, whilst this is well known, effective collaboration is extremely difficult to execute in practice owing to a host of intra- and inter-organisational factors such as competing priorities, funding, ways of working and IT and data systems, compounded by the number of stakeholders involved in a child's journey to adulthood.

We suggest that complex problems such as intergenerational disadvantage require more than traditional collaboration, and that the collective impact approach shows the most promise. Collective impact refers to 'long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem'. Collective impact is more than collaboration, with organisations committing to a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, ongoing communications, and support for an independent backbone organisation with staff dedicated to facilitating collective effort.³⁶

A joined up approach: The Geelong Project

The community of schools and services (COSS) model is an example of this approach and underpins the 'Geelong Project' in Victoria.³⁷ Led by Barwon Child, Youth and Family, this early intervention project is a place-based partnership aimed at preventing young people at risk of disengaging from or leaving school from becoming homeless and entering the justice system. The partnership includes Swinburne University, headspace Geelong, the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network, and three pilot schools within disadvantaged areas.

The Geelong Project is being evaluated and following its first three years of operation, has reported some positive outcomes including:

- Between 2013-2016, the number of adolescents entering the Specialist Homelessness Service system in Geelong declined by 40 percent from a 10-year base line of 230 to a new post-TGP base line of about 100 cases.
- The school disengagement indicator has showed a shift to improved school engagement since 2013 – from 8.9 percent at high risk of school disengagement or an estimated 197 students to 4.6 percent of about 100 students.
- Early school leaving has been reduced by about 20 percent for the three pilot schools. In 2013, more students left school early from the three pilot schools than the other nine state secondary schools in Geelong. By 2016, that had been reversed: the majority of early school leavers came from the other schools.

A key element of the model is the assessment tool – the Australian Index of Adolescent Development survey (AIAD), which was developed by Swinburne University for the Project. This survey screens all students to identify those with incipient issues such as family conflict, poor mental health and disengagement from education which, when left unsupported, are strong correlating factors in young people engaging in criminal activity, entering homelessness and a lifelong reliance on support services. The survey continues to assess those at risk at key stages throughout their journey through school and flags and levers intervention where required. The Project delivers flexible and responsive services to the

³⁶ Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter, 36-41

³⁷ MacKenzie, D. (2018) *The Geelong Project Interim Report*: http://www.thegeelongproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/TGP_Interim_Report_FINAL_e-PRINT.pdf

needs of those students identified at risk, acknowledging that not all students need the same level of support.

The Geelong Project stemmed from the determination of a group of practitioner-leaders who recognised that the current approach to reduce youth homelessness, school disengagement and youth offending was not working and in need of reform. They also acknowledged that working in partnership would not be easy but despite pooled government funding coming to an end and despite youth workers answering to different funding streams found ways to operate as a collective – through service amalgamation and forming an ‘early intervention platform’. The Project’s outcomes to date are testimony of what can be achieved through effective collaboration.