



**yourtown** position statement

# Tackling Long-term Youth Unemployment



# Foreword by Tracy Adams, **yourtown** CEO

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 as 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 into 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 and sustaining employment:

- **Educational** - such as low levels of formal schooling, literacy and numeracy
- **Vocational** - such as limited work history and low work skills
- **Practical** - such as not having a driver's licence and limited access to support through social/familial networks or services
- **Contextual** - such as intergenerational unemployment and living in low socio-economic areas
- **Psycho-social** - such as mental health concerns, substance use and homelessness
- **Cognitive-motivational** - such as low self-esteem and poor decision-making skills
- **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 – a 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.

Indigenous 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 principle 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

In this position statement, we have 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. It is a model designed to meet a range of different needs throughout a long-term unemployed young person's journey into work. Given the extensive evidence that shows that it can work, it is also a model to which **yourtown** is fully committed; we are 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. **yourtown** 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 on young people and the community are thoroughly tested and measured.

We are sharing this model as it is our hope that other services and communities will use it or elements of it to better support long-term unemployed young people. Indeed, using this insight, we hope to work with government, our peers, a broad range of support services and the families and young people affected by long-term unemployment to help ensure young people have the start in life that they deserve.



# yourtown's Position on Tackling Long-term Youth Unemployment

Young people in long-term unemployment are not a homogenous group and have varying experiences. They require tailored, individualised and intensive assistance. Driven by this overarching theme, a number of key elements have been identified in research literature to assist young people in long-term unemployment. These elements have then been further expanded through yourtown's own research with young people in long-term unemployment and stakeholders with expertise in working with this cohort to develop a model of response to best support long-term unemployed young people to transition into work.

The key elements in our recommended model of response are as follows:

**Individualised Interventions** that respond to the needs and address the specific barriers of individuals. Each young person would be supported by a youth worker who focuses on the non-vocational barriers and a youth specialist trainer/employment consultant who would implement an individualised plan to address vocational needs and facilitate job placements. These positions would act as a team that works with the young person to ensure a coordinated response.

The youth worker would have a particular responsibility to ensure that the young person benefited from a 'joined-up' case management response involving all providers of support which would also be informed and guided by evidence-based work readiness assessment tools. The youth worker would also be responsible for the development and implementation of group workshops, and post-placement support to both the young person and the employer.

**Training Programs** for acquiring skills and gaining accredited qualifications. Referrals and participation in these courses should be based on the interests and aptitudes of each young person. In addition, potential pathways to jobs should be evident from these courses prior to enrolment. Training programs to address the literacy and numeracy needs of young long-term unemployed people should also be provided where required.

**Employment Programs** for gaining vocational skills and work experience through experiential learning while receiving added support for non-vocational issues. Referrals to these work preparation and social enterprise programs would be based on the needs and interests of the young person. While these programs can provide work experience and skills for young people, the key component is the added support to resolve or to lessen the impact of non-vocational issues associated with being in long-term unemployment.

These programs should be centred on providing participants with 'real mainstream work' opportunities. To be viable these programs need to secure a consistent flow of work opportunities. The government and private enterprise sectors have a role in supporting these employment programs through social procurement policies and purchasing behaviours whereby a proportion of their procurement budgets would be sourced from social enterprises and/or employment programs supporting long-term unemployed youth participants.

**Local Inductions in Employer, Community and Local Labour Market Needs** to determine the specific job and employability skills required by employers and for delivering approaches that recognise community and local labour market factors. While it is commonly understood within the employment sector that the needs of employers must be taken into account when preparing young people for work, this information is not necessarily being passed onto young people. An engaging way for young people in long-term unemployment to learn about the needs of employers, communities and local labour markets is through informal group conversations with employers to discuss the key components of their recruitment process and criteria. In addition, these conversations could also provide opportunities for young people to hear from former program clients who have transitioned into mainstream employment.

**Active Policies** that specifically address the needs of young people in long-term unemployment and that increase the availability of jobs for youth. Current employment policies only place a limited focus on long-term youth unemployment. These policies need to be recalibrated to account for the additional investment needed to provide the tailored and individualised intensive support and the other elements of the recommended model to all young people experiencing long-term youth unemployment to enable their transition into sustainable employment.

More detail about this service model and its evidence-base is outlined in our full Advocacy Paper on the issue which is available on our website.



# Model of response

## Individualised interventions



Youth Worker support embedded into programs



Dual support team of a Youth Worker and Youth Trainer/Employment Consultant



Case management guided by evidence-based work readiness assessment tools



Case loads of no more than 25 young people at any one time to ensure the provision of intensive customised support



Referrals and assistance with navigating pathways to specialised support



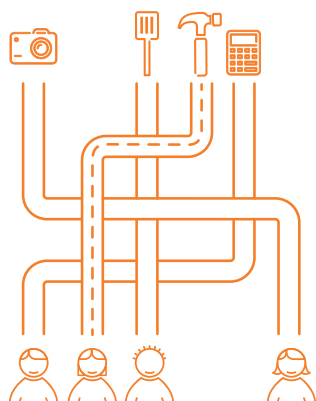
Group workshops to develop employability skills and address non-vocational barriers



Rigorous post-placement support to both the young person and the employer

## Training programs

Qualifications linked to interests and job pathways



## Employment programs



Work preparation programs for skills

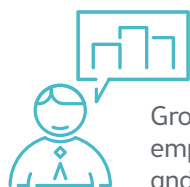


Social enterprises for paid work experience



Added support and interventions for employability skills and non-vocational issues

## Local inductions to employer, community and local labour market needs



Group conversations with local employers about recruitment processes and workplace expectations



Group conversations with previous clients about their journey into sustainable employment

## Active policies



Advocating for policies specifically addressing long-term youth unemployment



Advocating for policies supporting intensive and tailored individualised interventions



Evaluation of this model of response to inform further service innovation



## About us

**yourtown** is a charity with services young people can access to find jobs, learn skills, become great parents and live safe happy lives. For over 56 years, we've been tackling the issues impacting young people in Australia – like youth unemployment and mental health, and taking on issues like domestic and family violence.

We aim to be part of the solution by delivering programs that tackle grassroots issues affecting our community. These include:

- **Counselling and Support** via Kids Helpline's 24/7 service for Australia's children and young people, Parentline for parents and carers, face-to-face support and Kids Helpline @ School.
- **Family and Community services** that help young families learn positive parenting and strengthen connections with the community.
- **Education and Engagement services** that support young people to remain in school and offer other positive pathways.
- **Job Training and Employment services** that give young people extra life choices and gets them jobs.
- Services specifically for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples** that create job options and education opportunities.
- **Accommodation services** that support young families facing homelessness and/or domestic and family violence.
- **Advocacy** that is informed by the issues impacting children, young people and families accessing our services and which seeks to initiate systemic social change to assist these children and people to achieve brighter futures.

The services of **yourtown** are 75% funded through the organisation's own independent fundraising activities. This provides **yourtown** with independence to both directly shape our services to meet the most critical needs of children, young people and their families and to speak-out on issues of primary concern to them.



## OUR VISION

young lives transformed,  
communities strengthened.

## OUR MISSION

To enable young people, especially those  
who are marginalised and without voice,  
to improve their quality of life.

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let's create brighter futures

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