

## Employment

### Background – about the Youth Action Group

We are a group of emerging young leaders (ages 18–25) who are passionate about raising the profile of young people in Melbourne. Our group, the YAG – which is supported by Melbourne City Mission through the State Government ‘Engage!’ initiative – works collaboratively with other young people over the course of one year to create and deliver two campaigns that champion the voice and accomplishments of Melbourne youth, and the issues that we care about.

We believe that young people are all **one step** away from making a life changing difference for themselves, and each other.

We want to walk away from stereotypes and towards a fairer and more inclusive society for young people. We will do this by:

- Creating fairer futures
- Deconstructing stereotypes
- Bridging gaps
- Promoting inclusion
- Advocating for the issues affecting the young people in Melbourne

The overarching goals for the YAG are to foster Melbourne’s next generation of civic leaders, create connections between diverse groups of young people, and make a difference in Melbourne.

As part of the Victorian Government’s ‘What’s Important to YOUth’ consultations, we were eager to put together a position paper on the topic of Employment, affirming our stance on this issue as one of the most important affecting young people in Victoria.

### What’s happening right now?

- Victoria is in the midst of a youth unemployment crisis. The average Victorian youth unemployment rate is now sitting at 14.7 per cent<sup>1</sup>.
- Youth unemployment is correlated with low educational attainment. More than 62 per cent of people unemployed in their youth have less than Year 12 education<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ABS data cited by VCOSS in The Age 14/08/14 at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/youth-unemployment-in-victoria-hits-15year-high-20140826-1089hk.html>

<sup>2</sup> HILDA survey, waves 1 – 11

## Young people's perspectives

As part of the youth consultations for 'What's Important to YOUth?' we dedicated one of our weekly meetings to brainstorm some of the more prominent issues linking young people and employment.

We've themed the information into three distinct categories:

- The importance of employment for young people
- That young people hold alternative views on the traditional employment system compared to previous generations
- The barriers to attaining and maintaining employment and how these impact young people.

### The importance of employment for young people

**Employment is an important aspect of life, giving us the freedom to be independent and responsible. It also allows us to provide for ourselves, having income to pay for things such as travel, education & training, medical bills and social activities. We also see our work as a reflection of who we are.**

- *"Having a job provides you with independence and essentially, it gives you resources for you to do things you want to be able to do – whether that's travel, food etc. There is an element of identity intertwined with a person's work. If you've got a job, you have more status in society to be able to interact with it."*
- *"It's a source of income and a way of socialising. It forms part of your identity. I would like to say it summarises your skills as a person but it doesn't. My job at the moment does not reflect my background or study so I don't feel like it's who I am."*
- *"Employment is a step into the future – it provides direction."*
- *"To an extent, some independence as it's your own income. Learning skills you may not learn in school, you are then able to apply elsewhere."*
- *"I almost died last year, so I had this realisation that you have to be able to look after yourself and your medical needs to provide you with what you need."*
- *"Based on my upbringing in an Asian culture and also identifying as a Christian and having Christian values, there's lots of social responsibility in having a job. My parents taught me that I should always contribute to society. They taught me that I should never work less than what I am capable of."*

### That young people hold alternative views on the traditional employment system compared to previous generations

**We are part of a generation who want to do things differently and hold a vision for our working future. We identified the breakdown of the relationship between older generations currently in the workforce, and younger generations looking to enter the workforce as a factor in the current climate of unemployment for young people.**

- *“I don’t want to buy into the system. I have my own questions and answers I want to seek and I don’t think getting a 9am – 5pm job is the only way of living life. I don’t want to buy my way into a job.”*
- *“I would rather have a PURPOSE than a JOB.”*
- *“The world is changing so rapidly. Maybe in 10 years traditional jobs won’t even exist. Education and communicate to younger people about where the future is going is crucial. We don’t know where we can help or where we can contribute because we don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. From the time I study to when I eventually graduate, the world is already so different.”*
- *“The Government and politicians don’t get it because they are out of touch. I feel like we’re kind of stuck with the baby boomer generation who think it’s EASY to gain employment but it’s the complete opposite. I feel like it’s kind of like leading lambs to slaughter. Just jump through the hoops, but then what? What’s at the end of it? Education for education sake. And then there’s the issue of ‘interning’, which is working really hard for nothing to gain some sort of experience.”*
- *“There is this classic tip we’re told as young people, which is to ‘go in and make a good impression’, but then you get there and you’re told ‘we only take applications online.’ The system is out of touch and every organisation has a different process.”*
- *“If we weren’t under so much pressure to find a job, we could actually explore ourselves and figure out what we were passionate about. I feel like there should be more of an emphasis on entrepreneurship.”*

### **The barriers to attaining and maintaining employment and how these impact young people**

**We identified barriers which impact on young people being able to find and keep a job. Factors such as disability, mental health, job market competition, and the current ‘one-size-fits-all’ system make it increasingly difficult to find ongoing employment suited to our career of choice and that fulfils our needs.**

- *“We have to choose a ‘career’ at a young age; 18 years old. This creates so much inefficiency. We don’t know what we want to do as a career when we are that young.”*
- *“It’s not been easy to get a job at all, even for those of us that have studied. It’s so hard to get into your chosen industry, particularly without the right networks and connections. We answer*

*key selection criteria with silent tears. I feel the system is raising people to just get and make money. Young people would rather pick up an extra shift than complete their degree because it's easy money. If you don't volunteer or have connections, you are basically set-up to fail."*

- *Sitting on more of the 'disadvantaged' scale of things. Things weren't easy for me or my family and that's followed me. Not having a caring parent to support and guide me has been really hard. Education & training – I've only gotten to year 9 and everywhere I go, I get kicked out. Everywhere I go, I feel isolated and socially unaccepted. I have a learning disability so I have a lot of trouble coping. I've never fit in at school."*
- *"The process should be easy but it's totally not. The competition out there is enormous. The amount of time I have tweaked my resume and cover letters is crazy. You get to a point where you get so desperate you will take anything, even if they treat you badly or don't officially have you on the books. Transferring from student to JobSeeker through Centrelink is a nightmare. I had to apply for any jobs and not jobs that were in alignment with what I had studied. So I was applying for all these jobs I didn't even want or wasn't interested in. Centrelink doesn't help you and neither do JSA's – they are all just ticking boxes and making quotas. It doesn't help us get where we want to go. You're encouraged to keep studying even if you've already finished higher education, just so you can get a job you don't even want."*
- *"Jobs advertised as 'entry level' but they require all these skills that you can't get without getting a job in the first place! It's a vicious cycle. There's increasing competition and more processes; it's insane the amount of hurdles we have to jump through just to get a job."*
- *"Centrelink make you attend appointments when other really important things are happening, like sitting for an exam!"*
- *"JSA's – they didn't help me, they hindered my progress."*
- *"I was being bullied at my hospitality job and my job agency wouldn't help me find new employment because I 'already had a job.' I got to a point where I would rather go to work every day and be bullied than be unemployed."*
- *"I had to leave my job because I was bullied and harassed. There was no support for me when this was happening either."*
- *"The world doesn't work like how we want it to work – we can't just walk into a place we like and 'get a job.' People don't just give you a chance."*
- *"Not finding or having the right connections is a huge barrier."*
- *"I volunteer for many different organisations and I'm trying to get a job in the community sector. I've never had proper paid work, and not having that has made it nearly impossible to get a job."*

*Because of all the different stages you can progress to in a job application, I wasted weeks just jumping through these hoops and at the end I didn't make it. I didn't get the job. I could have spent all that time looking for something else, it felt like such a huge waste of my time."*

- *"I think there's a lot of oversupply for lots of industries of students. For example, there are heaps of commerce students in my course and I think this puts companies in a particularly difficult position and increases competition. I know people who are willing to pay money to get an internship, just so they have a better chance to get a job. Companies need to be more specific about the kind of people they're looking for and universities don't help this process at all."*
- *"Work experience and not being able to satisfy employer's requirements. They are looking for the perfect candidate and there is NO SUCH THING as a perfect candidate!"*
- *"Having an older workforce is a barrier. We have people staying in jobs until their 70, so they are staying in jobs longer and positions aren't opening up."*
- *"Lack of opportunity and the way the system is currently built for 'one-size-fits-all.'"*
- *"The application process is so intimidating."*
- *"Medical reasons are a barrier to me finding work."*
- *"The Government is punishing people for not being able to find a job. **There is no job factory.**"*

## **Recommendations**

We had many ideas on how we felt the Victorian Government could support young people in Victoria to find and maintain employment opportunities:

Our suggestions focus on:

- **The role of businesses**
  - Affordable and accessible ways to create networks and connections
  - Creating healthy working environments and cultures, which don't stigmatise or de-humanise employees
  - Develop processes which increase and improve communication between employers and employees, allowing for an equitable and fair working system for all
- **How the education system can better prepare us for employment**
  - Mandatory and relevant placements; particularly in the higher education system
  - Improve the job-matching process
  - More effective pathways out of education and into employment

- **The role of Government in making the education system accessible for all young people**
  - Free education!
  - Complete overhaul of the Centrelink and Job Services systems. There needs to be a review on the way job service agencies currently operate, so that the focus is not on 'ticking boxes' but rather on finding meaningful and sustainable employment
  - Accommodate more to youth and have this in mind when developing policies that affect young people.

**“We need a whole of society approach to employment. We need to come together as a community.”**