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Unemployment has decreased to the lowest level for decades and the Australian economy is experiencing difficulty getting enough skilled workers in some sectors. However, homeless young people have difficulty accessing the labour market even when there are semi-skilled jobs for which they might qualify. Evidence was provided that Job Network generally does not service the needs of highly disadvantaged young people appropriately and that Work for the Dole is a poorly conceived work experience model. The JPET program was discussed as having positive aspects but changes from one department to another and the refocusing on employment outcomes has degraded JPET's value for homeless young people. An under-estimation of the issues that many homeless young people face and the effort required to overcome them underpins much of the poor policy in this area. Major reform is needed to link education, training and employment program with accommodation and other supports.

Chapter 20 | Employment, Education and Training

Introduction

20.1 In Chapter 8 Labour Market Marginalisation the changes in the youth labour market over the past 15 years were discussed and the significant barriers that limit employment opportunities for homeless young people were highlighted. Clearly the problems of youth homelessness and unemployment are connected. Homeless young people face many barriers in finding and maintaining jobs even in a relatively buoyant labour market. Some manage the task and others are able to stay connected to education or training in some form. Some young people become homeless because of the difficulty in maintaining a home while on limited income from insecure and poorly paid work. Many homeless young people remain unemployed for long periods, resulting in them experiencing difficulty in moving out of homelessness.

20.2 This chapter briefly describes the Commonwealth Government's labour market programs, some state and territory government programs and a few community services that assist homeless young people to find work. Consideration is also given to whether homeless young people can benefit from these programs and what improvements are needed to better assist them to gain employment.

Australian Government Policy

20.3 The Australian Government has the primary responsibility for supporting unemployed people. This is achieved through income support systems (discussed in Chapter 19), labour market programs and industrial relations policy.

20.4 As the number of unemployed people has fallen since the early 1990s, those remaining without work tend to be the most disadvantaged. During this period, Australian Government labour market policies changed to focus on personal skills acquisition (e.g. job-search training, on-the-job skills training and intensive personal assistance), with an increasing emphasis on ‘mutual obligation.’¹ Mutual obligation is:

*... about you giving something back to the community, which supports you. This means you are expected to actively look for work, accept suitable work offers and undertake extra activities to improve your chances of finding work.*²

20.5 Unemployed people who are in receipt of a government benefit are expected to undertake certain activities to assist them find employment or participate in community service programs when required. The Australian Government’s main program supporting mutual obligation is the Work for the Dole scheme.

20.6 This policy development reflects a shift to more neo-liberal policy settings that reflect a greater belief in self-reliance, and the consequent reduction in government social supports and economic interventions.

20.7 The industrial relations system, under WorkChoices, has been changed to place greater emphasis on agreements between employers and individual employees with a consequent diminution in the significance of the Australian industrial award system. Under the current system, state governments can still protect employees under the age of 18 through the continued application of child labour laws. For example, in NSW, the relevant legislation requires that young people must be employed under terms and conditions which are at least equivalent to those specified in NSW awards and legislation.³ However, not all jurisdictions have similar legislation. The new Federal Labor Government has moved quickly to reverse much of the reform undertaken under the Howard Government.

20.8 All people 18 years and over now need to be able to negotiate their own wages and working conditions if the employer adopts the individual agreement option. Shop-front Legal Centre believes that:

*... this presents a further serious obstacle towards the ability of homeless young people to find, and to secure, meaningful, long-term employment, which is fair in terms of both pay and conditions. The requirement under WorkChoices that young adults negotiate their terms of employment disadvantages these individuals - many of whom are already inexperienced in the workplace, who are unlikely to have the confidence to negotiate their employment contract, and who will be placed in a position of unfair bargaining power.*⁴

20.9 At the time of writing there has been a federal election in which the Australian Labor Party (ALP) gained a majority in the House of Representatives. The ALP’s electoral platform included significant changes to the industrial relations system in Australia. It remains to be seen how this platform will be translated into legislation and whether the Australian Senate will pass the legislation.

Labour market programs

Job Network

20.10 The Australian Government-funded Job Network is the main system for assisting unemployed people to find work. It is a national network of private and community organisations that assists unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, by providing advice on job search techniques, career options and employment programs. For longer-term unemployed people it provides intensive support on a one-to-one basis for job search planning and training.⁵ There are a few specialist youth Job Network providers but most unemployed young people attend mainstream services.

20.11 Catholic Social Services Australia has been critical of the Job Network for not adequately assisting the most disadvantaged job seekers. They have reported an increase in the complexity of needs of job seekers including an increase in the proportion of clients with low educational attainment.⁶ Catholic Social Services Australia suggest that the problem lies in the way in which the Job Network services are funded and their quality measured which currently encourages providers to focus on the more advantaged job seekers.⁷ This was reflected in the evidence presented to the Inquiry, which was told that Job Network services were not always helpful to homeless young people. UnitingCare Burnside's submission stated:

While assistance, both practical and financial, may be available through their Job Network provider this wasn't always seen to be beneficial. One young person stated that her Job Network provider had done little if anything to assist her in finding work.⁸

A range of evidence given during the NYC hearings about the Job Network highlighted its limitations to appropriately respond to the complex needs of young people who were homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

Work for the Dole

20.12 The Work for the Dole scheme aims to give long-term unemployed people work experience while doing something worthwhile for their community. It is an approved activity for mutual obligation purposes. Unemployed people aged 18 or over and on Newstart, Youth Allowance, Disability Support Pension or Parenting Payment can volunteer for Work for the Dole.⁹ The aim of the Work for the Dole program is to:

... foster work habits and attitudes, improve participants' self esteem; and contribute to local communities by the establishment of projects of value to the community.¹⁰

20.13 An independent evaluation of the Work for the Dole program found that the scheme had many failings in that it did not significantly improve self-esteem or attitudes to work (these being already positive) and, in particular, did not suit disadvantaged job seekers, including homeless young people.¹¹ The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has been critical of the scheme because it does not include formal training, does not lead to paid employment and compares poorly in terms of employment with Intensive Assistance under the Job Network and the former Working Nation schemes of Jobskills and Jobstart.¹²

Green Corps

20.14 Green Corps is an:

*Australian Government youth development and environmental training program for young people aged between 17 and 20 years. Green Corps provides young people with the opportunity to volunteer their time and effort to conserve, preserve and restore Australia's natural environment and cultural heritage.*¹³

20.15 While Green Corps has many positive aspects, such as its link to training and a focus on employment in an industry of interest to the participant, it is unlikely to be suitable to most homeless young people. It requires a high level of commitment to a single industry and is full-time for 26 weeks.

*Indigenous Youth Employment Consultants*¹⁴

20.16 The Indigenous Youth Employment Consultants (IYEC) program provides support and encouragement for Indigenous young people aged 15 to 19 to stay in education or move into training and/or work.

20.17 The program is for Indigenous young people who:

- are not going to school
- want to continue their education and/or training and would like extra support
- would like to join the workforce.

20.18 Consultants working for Job Network providers are found across Australia in areas where there is a good labour market. They work closely with Indigenous young people, as well as their families, local communities and businesses, schools, vocational educational and training providers and other Job Network providers to help them stay in education or move into training and/or work.

Personal Support Programme

20.19 The Personal Support Programme (PSP) helps people tackle difficult personal circumstances and stay connected to the economic and social life of the community. It is a bridge between short-term crisis services and employment services such as Job Network.¹⁵ While not specifically a youth program, some young people, particularly those over 21 years, may access the program as part of their requirements to receive Newstart Allowance.

Job Placement, Employment and Training Program

20.20 The Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) Program is the main labour market program for homeless young people in Australia. It ran as a pilot between 1993 and 1995 in 44 sites across Australia. After a hiatus in 1996, an expanded JPET program commenced in 1997¹⁶ and is still operating in 2007.

20.21 The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) states that the program:

... assists young people aged between 15 and 21 years, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or have multiple barriers that severely limit their capacity to:

- participate socially in the life of their communities*
- participate in economic focused activity such as education, employment or vocational training and/or*
- benefit from employment assistance.*

The program helps young people overcome barriers such as:

- drug or alcohol abuse*
- sexual abuse or violence*
- domestic violence*
- behavioural problems*
- physical or intellectual disability*
- mental health problems*
- self harming behaviours*
- history of committing offences*
- experiences of torture and trauma.¹⁷*

20.22 In a combined submission the Council to Homeless Persons, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i told the Inquiry they believe that JPET:

... has historically been seen as a “pre-employment” program that holistically examines issues affecting young people’s ability to move towards greater stability and independence through engagement in employment, education and training opportunities.¹⁸

20.23 The JPET program has been shifted from one government department to another several times since its inception. It commenced in the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) but then moved to the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS, then FaCSIA is now FaHCSIA since the 2007 Federal election). In 2003 the JPET program moved from the Department of Families, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA) to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). Youth workers and policy workers told the Inquiry they believed this latest administrative shift had, as one witness put it, “... changed JPET’s focus significantly”.¹⁹

20.24 One of the significant changes with JPET moving from FaCSIA to DEWR is that it has gone from being a voluntary program to a compulsory one if a young person is receiving a Centrelink benefit i.e. it may be part of an activity agreement (see Chapter 19 Income Support). According to one JPET worker the changes mean that young people:

... have to actively participate by having contact with us face-to-face, by achieving little goals that they put down on their case plan. So, the focus has gone from more of a

*voluntary program to more ... they need to do this, in order to receive payments.*²⁰

20.25 This can have both positive and negative effects:

*... because then it actually encourages the young person to start looking at the bigger picture and engaging, but also it can be very detrimental to those that just don't have those skills, social skills, or have the ability to remember an appointment or keep in contact.*²¹

20.26 The shift has also meant that JPET is being required to focus on employment outcomes at the expense of the social development of young people. The social development of young people is considered, by an experienced youth worker, to be "... essential if they're going to obtain the employment outcome".²²

20.27 The shift has also entailed an increase in reporting requirements to the Government. These changes in reporting have led some to question the value of the program. In Sydney, the Inquiry heard the musings of a service provider who was considering whether to:

*... pull out of it, it's getting so hard at the moment, because they're wanting you to count more and more and be judged by the fact of how many kids at this point of time, you've got into jobs.*²³

20.28 Anglicare WA, in its submission, was highly critical of the recent changes to the JPET program:

*JPET was once a highly effective mechanism for assisting homeless young people to overcome social barriers to employment and training. This will be lost if current trends of an increase in focus on economic outcomes over social outcomes and the increased competition between providers may result in providers being more concerned about increasing their business share rather than building supporting relationships with young people in order to meet their needs.*²⁴

20.29 Despite the problems in administering the program and questions about its effectiveness, there appears to be an increasing demand for JPET services. For example, one JPET worker highlighted to the Inquiry the ongoing need for the program:

*Being a JPET worker on a program that is designed specifically for homeless or at risk of homeless youth is really quite demanding at the moment. We currently have ACT waiting lists of about 50 clients, and caseloads are relatively high.*²⁵

20.30 The increase in uptake could be put down either to the compulsory nature of the program for unemployed young people or to the last DEWR tender process for the JPET program that pushed each service provider to cover a wider geographical catchment area and set higher targets for the number of young people supported under the program.

20.3 The same worker also told the Inquiry of institutional barriers that hinder co-ordination between SAAP and JPET services as each has its own funding department and requirements. She indicated that JPET and SAAP services need to work together to

achieve the outcomes for their clients desired by both programs.²⁶

20.32 Recommendations were made to the Inquiry that JPET return to FaHCSIA, and more closely align with the SAAP program and address the increasingly onerous administrative demands of program management.

State and Territory Government Programs

20.33 Programs to assist unemployed people to gain work are responsibility of the Australian Government. However, some state governments have reported to the Inquiry on their own efforts to assist unemployed young people. Most state and territory governments have programs aimed at increasing participation in education and training by disadvantaged young people, including homeless young people.

South Australia Works Program

20.34 The South Australian Government's South Australia Works Program recognises young people as a priority group. Under this program, young people have the opportunity to gain job and life skills while still at school. They are provided with alternative learning options if they are at risk of leaving school early, and can take up traineeships in state and local government employment.²⁷

Queensland Education and Training Reforms for the Future

20.35 This is a package of reforms that represents the Queensland Government's response to the clear connections between education and sustainable employment. A key element of reforms was the introduction of a compulsory participation phase in which all young people are required to participate in learning or earning:

- for two years after they complete compulsory schooling (i.e. year 10 or 16 years); or
- until they have completed a Queensland Certificate of Education, Certificate III or IV vocational qualification; or
- until they have turned 17 years of age.²⁸

20.36 Young people who are in full-time employment are not required to participate in education and training.

Victorian Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative (YEETI)

20.37 In Victoria, the Youth Homelessness Action Plan includes the Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative (YEETI) that assists young people aged 15 to 25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and have a long-term history of difficulties in education, employment or accommodation.

20.38 The YEETI aims to enable young people to make a successful transition from the homelessness service system to independence through education, training or employment outcomes.²⁹

Community programs

20.39 Using funds from a variety of sources depending on the target group and the nature of the program, many community agencies have developed specific programs to assist homeless people to gain employment. The Inquiry heard of some of the community efforts occurring across Australia.

Youth Enterprise

20.40 Youth enterprise schemes have been developed in some areas to assist young people to gain experience and skills for employment and business. In Warrnambool, for example, the Inquiry was told about:

*... a program called Culture Shift ...[that] provides a youth enterprise focus. We have a shop where we sell young people's gear and we have a number of youth enterprise projects that we run out of that particular shop.*³⁰

Community Living Association

20.41 The Community Living Association in Brisbane has established programs to assist homeless young people who have intellectual disabilities. They told the Inquiry of:

*One homeless young guy we support, he now sells The Big Issue. He actually sells it at the University of Queensland. We have recruited a group of students to support him to sell The Big Issue. Each year as students move over, they will recruit some new students to support him. He has a stand and they go and talk to him and spend some time with him, and he's out there selling the Big Issue. That is a bit of a stable income there. That was a young man who had never... actually made attempts to sell The Big Issue before on street corners but people ignored him. He wasn't able to hold the concentration to stay there for a period of time and wasn't often successful at that.*³¹

20.42 The same organisation established:

*... a workers' co-operative which now employs 16 people, and it has contracts with the Brisbane City Council to do parks, and also does catering in a cafe. What we found is that that can only survive if you have essentially an able bodied worker working alongside, so there is one on one or at the most one on two.*³²

20.43 The co-operative costs the organisation \$100,000 per year to maintain and represents good value for money (at around \$6250 per client per year) but without external financial support may be unviable in the long-term.

SAAP Employment Assistance

20.44 Many SAAP services assist homeless young people with employment through coordination with or referral to JPET, Job Network or other assistance. Other SAAP services have a more hands-on approach. In Launceston, one SAAP service noted that while homeless people encountered barriers to employment such as poor literacy and a

history of incarceration, a major factor was the lack of transport to places where work was available. Their solution was to put their clients “... on a bus and drive them in ungodly hours of the morning to agricultural work because there was a shortage in that industry”.³³ The service had been doing this for around four-and-a-half years and reported positive outcomes such as homeless young people having disposable income from employment which, according to the SAAP worker:

*They actually worked hard for it and so weren't going to, to quote them, "piss that up against the wall. I worked hard for that".*³⁴

20.45 This service has taken an additional step and linked with training in horticulture that is related to the agricultural employment opportunities found for their clients.

Joined up services

20.46 A group of organisations in Victoria has come together to develop a new co-ordinated system, called YP4, to assist individuals aged 18 to 35 years who experience both homelessness and unemployment in a ‘joined up’ service. In their submission YP4 claimed that their program is:

*... a new paradigm for assisting individuals who experience both homelessness and unemployment, in recognition that existing forms of housing and employment assistance are linear, ineffective and inefficient for homeless jobseekers. YP4 offers homeless jobseekers a single and consistent point of contact to address employment, housing, educational and personal support goals in an integrated manner over a two-year period.*³⁵

The project was described as the ‘trail-blazing’ by Chief Executive Officer of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Tony Nicholson³⁶ and by YP4 researchers as ‘probably the most ambitious attempt to join up and integrate public assistance for disadvantaged people in recent Australian history’.³⁷ The project has been established as a social experiment where by homeless young people are randomly assigned to the ‘joined up’ YP4 program (J group) or control group receiving a standard suite of services (S group). The test of this methodology requires statistically significant differences on the core outcomes of the trial. At the time of the NYC report such outcomes analysis was not available.

20.47 YP4 combines funding and other resources from SAAP, PSP, Job Network, JPET, and other programs and applies them more flexibly for young homeless jobseekers. A total funding of \$5,600,000 has been assembled from four government departments, two Commonwealth and two Victorian state departments, as well as \$1,500,000 from four philanthropic trusts. The three year trial commenced in 2005 and was due to finish sometime in 2008. A final evaluation report has been foreshadowed for 2009.

Issues with employment programs for homeless young people

20.48 Getting and retaining a job is much more complex than having secure accommodation, and appropriate skills or work being available. Mission Australia (2006) has identified a participation continuum of nine complex and interrelated factors for social

and economic participation of young people. These factors are:

- connectedness, either to family and/or peers and/or to the community;
- physical and mental well-being;
- social and emotional resilience;
- affordable and secure housing;
- appropriate education and training;
- employability skills such as communication skills, conflict skills, timetabling;
- rewarding and secure employment;
- financial security; and
- aspirations and goals.³⁸

20.49 The issues of connectedness, accommodation, education and training and secure employment are significant problems for services seeking to assist homeless young people with employment.

Accommodation first?

20.50 To date most assistance provided to homeless young people is predicated on the belief that securing safe accommodation is the main priority before education, training or employment options can be explored. This 'accommodation first' approach seems to be the accepted wisdom of most workers in SAAP, JPET and other youth services who spoke to the Inquiry. For example, the Inquiry was told:

*There is a lot of work that needs to be done with young people before they are ready for full employment and education. It is very, very hard to talk about employment with young people, especially when public transport is so bad. It is too hard to say let's get a job and then let's see where you end up living. You really have to stabilise the accommodation before you can look at securing employment for them.*³⁹

20.51 Once accommodation is secured other issues can be addressed, provided the accommodation is:

*... safe accommodation, that's caring, that takes in the holistic view of their education and maybe start with getting them back into school or TAFE to finish their schooling and give them the support that they need ...*⁴⁰

20.52 Other programs such as YP4, have attempted to address homelessness and unemployment concurrently. While it is too early to judge the success of the YP4 project evidence given to the Inquiry by YP4 staff claimed that some people were improving their situation through joined up service provision with some of their clients gaining employment (albeit temporary work) and improving their community connectedness.⁴¹

20.53 The Foyer Model (see Chapter 16), with links between accommodation and education, training and employment, may be an important solution to this dilemma.

Employment security

20.54 Labour market statistics show that while young people are increasingly going into paid employment much of their work is short-term, part-time and casual. This has significant implications for services assisting homeless young people with employment. Hanover Welfare Services, for example, told the Inquiry that the ‘casualisation’ of the labour market:

*... raises some longer-term questions around the sustainability of employment outcomes for young people in these programs. ... Are they simply a case that young people are siphoning through a range of short-term casual jobs or does it give them enough exposure to paid employment over an undefined period of time, that they will move into more and better paid jobs, more sustainable, longer-term jobs and the like?*⁴²

20.55 Secure employment is essential to being able to maintain accommodation and prevent further periods of homelessness.

Link between education and employment

20.56 The connection between education and employment is clear: people who have completed school have lower rates of unemployment than those who left school without completing year 12 or its equivalent. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum, in their analysis of youth labour markets, concluded that:

*It is clear that in the modern Australian economy, many young people without school completion or a Certificate III qualification are likely to face long-term disadvantages in the labour market.*⁴³

20.57 Many witnesses appearing at hearings and in written submissions highlighted the difficulties homeless young people have had in remaining in school.⁴⁴ Many homeless young people drop out of school as other priorities take precedence and some are suspended or excluded for poor attendance and behavioural issues. Without links back into mainstream education or training many homeless or formerly homeless young people will continue to be disadvantaged in the labour market.

A renewed national effort on youth employment, education and training

20.58 The Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Australia Industry Group have identified that a unique set of factors exist in Australia at present - strong economic conditions, the need for a skilled workforce and an ageing population - which means it is possible and essential to engage all young Australians in learning or work. In calling for a sustained and coordinated approach, they have set out clear objectives for all Australian governments that every young person will:

- attain Year 12 or Certificate III level;
- be engaged in full-time work or learning, or a combination of these;
- be provided with the resources, and assisted to access the relationships and integrated pathways needed to achieve these outcomes.⁴⁵

20.59 The Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Australia Industry Group suggest 10 main reform areas, four of which are pertinent to assisting homeless or formerly homeless young people. These four are:

- second chance options for young adults to complete Year 12 or its equivalent;
- personal support or mentoring for every potential early school leaver to make a successful transition to further learning or work;
- improved teacher support and preparation for 'hard to teach' students; and
- an Indigenous presence in schools and support for Indigenous students and communities.⁴⁶

Findings and Recommendations

20.60 The importance of education and training to employment cannot be understated in the modern Australian economy. Unemployed young people need to develop skills relevant to the workplace but, unfortunately, many homeless young people drop out of school. Homeless young people are among those least able to take advantage of labour market opportunities by using employment services designed for the mainstream. For this reason, programs such as the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program provide a critical support for homeless young people. As a 'pre-employment' program it provides a vital link between homeless young people and the mainstream employment services of the Job Network.

Recommendation 20.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be embedded as part of the coordinated response to youth homelessness.

Recommendation 20.2:

The NYC Inquiry recommends the Jobs Placement, Education and Training Program [JPET] be refocused as a pre-employment program to help homeless young people overcome the social barriers to their participation in education, training or employment, and expanded to more adequately reach the number of homeless young people who need this kind of assistance.

20.61 Homeless young people need to stabilise their accommodation and other issues before employment can be considered. Further, once these are stabilised, additional supports may be needed to maintain young people in accommodation and provide assistance to find work or continue in education or training. The Foyer model, discussed in Chapter 16, links accommodation to education, training and employment in a way that the latter is the primary incentive.

Recommendation 20.3

The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be linked in a package to the provision of accommodation and support. This would include youth housing such as Foyer housing, or similar models, which need to be closely linked with SAAP services.

Recommendation 20.4

The NYC Inquiry recommends that supported employment be available for up to two years for homeless or at-risk young people with high and/or complex needs. Supported employment would involve:

- a case worker available to support both the young person and his/her employer;
- appropriate employer linked subsidies;
- a capacity to liaise with employers to negotiate job placements under the supported employment program.

Recommendation 20.5

The NYC Inquiry recommends that innovation funds be made available for the development of not-for-profit businesses that employ homeless young people and provide services and products to the general community. The primary purpose of these businesses would be to provide real employment experiences for at-risk and homeless young people, who are not ready for employment in the broader labour market.

20.62 There is a consensus that a renewed national effort is required to achieve higher school completions (or equivalent) and full employment in the youth labour market. Technical education, adult campuses, flexible enrolment and alternative programs such as POEM (now known as Connections) provide a wider range of options and pathways. However, particular attention needs to be directed to the support required by the most disadvantaged young people, including homeless young people. Although most young people will leave school and make a successful transition into post-secondary education in TAFE, university or employment, requiring little or no assistance beyond what is currently available, there is a group who do need support and assistance. At the point of leaving, there is an opportunity to collect information and to monitor the issue of early school leaving as well as provide assistance. The idea of workers from outside the schools, who work closely with careers teachers to directly support young people moving into the labour market would position a network of support at a point where systemic contact with young people is still possible.

Recommendation 20.6

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the transitions of young people from school to post-school employment options be supported by a national case management program providing transition assistance on an individual needs basis.

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