



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Youth Jobs Strategy

October 2023



**INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE**

About TasCOSS

TasCOSS's vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania; and to challenge and change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to Tasmanians on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

TasCOSS welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Department of State Growth (Jobs Tasmania) and the Department for Education, Children and Young People ('the Departments') in relation to the Youth Jobs Strategy ('the Strategy').

As the peak body for community service organisations in Tasmania, TasCOSS works alongside several community organisations supporting Tasmanian young people and their families. We know the importance of employment from our work supporting these organisations and the conversations we have had with Tasmanians across the State. Our work developing the Good Life Project¹ highlighted the negative impacts of insecure work and unemployment, as well as the benefits of stable, ongoing work in maintaining social connections, feeling valued, and being able to afford the basics.

We also know many young Tasmanians are struggling to enter the workforce or obtain stable, secure work. Unemployment and underemployment of young people has been identified as an issue for several years, not just in Tasmania but throughout Australia.² These issues were further exacerbated by Covid 19, which had a dramatic impact on youth in particular. As noted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in recent research,³ young workers have borne the brunt of job losses as they are highly represented in the industries most impacted (such as hospitality, retail and physical fitness). Their report noted that in June 2020, 'unemployment among people aged 15 to 24 reached a 23-year high of 16.4%'⁴. Even after the end of measures such as lockdowns which had a significant impact on youth employment across the country, young people are still overrepresented in marginal and precarious forms of employment, such as part-time, casual and insecure roles/industries. The Brotherhood of St Laurence also noted that underemployment has emerged as a significant issue for young people, with their report finding that although rates peaked in April 2020, they have continued to remain high, resulting in 'one in three young people in the labour force unable to get enough hours of work to make ends meet'.⁵

We support the aims of the Strategy in seeking to address the employment needs of Tasmania's young people. Employment plays a huge role in maintaining the health and wellbeing of all Tasmanians, with research confirming the importance of stable, appropriately-remunerated employment for young people and communities. Our submission is not intended to be read as a comprehensive response to all Strategy questions but rather seeks to highlight key points for consideration by the Departments. As the peak body for community service organisations in Tasmania, our response is focused on how we best support young people to enter and remain in jobs within our sector. Our submission also calls for diversity and inclusion measures within all workplaces to ensure young people can feel safe and supported at work, regardless of their industry or profession. We also highlight the disproportionate impact of precarious labor

¹ The Good Life is a project undertaken by TasCOSS, following a number of community consultations throughout Tasmania around the question, "What do you need for a good life?". The project identified key priorities for Tasmanians, which has allowed TasCOSS to identify goals, targets and indicators around which to engage in policy development and advocacy. Access here: <https://tascoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/A-Good-Life-Domains-Goals-Descriptors-February-2023.pdf>.

² For example, see Brotherhood of St Laurence, 'Unfair Australia? Mapping Youth Unemployment Hotspots' (March 2018), Brotherhood of St Laurence, 'Reality Bites: Australia's Youth Unemployment in a Millennial Era' (December 2017).

³ Brotherhood of St Laurence, 'Covid the Great Disruptor' (December 2020).

⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁵ Ibid.

conditions and workplace discrimination on young people, and the need for Government intervention and support to ensure Tasmanian youth are aware of and able to exercise their employment rights.

Key Issues

Other issues impacting youth employment

To address the employment needs of Tasmania's young people, as well as their families and communities, TasCOSS strongly believes the Strategy must also include recommendations and initiatives designed to target key issues impacting youth employment.

While the Strategy does acknowledge there are many complex and intersecting issues which are impacting youth employment, it also includes the clear statement that the Strategy 'will not directly address mental health, housing and other youth services reforms' as they are the 'focus of other policies and strategies under development'.

The Strategy does include a focus on some other issues which may be impacting employment, including additional supports for young people with different needs (such as youth with disability or caring responsibilities), and transport disadvantage. We believe these and other issues need to be addressed in the strategy and, given the relationships between these issues in terms of their impact on youth employment, a whole-of-government approach is needed. We therefore recommend the Strategy include at minimum an overview and initiatives directed towards the following key issues:

- **Transport disadvantage and accessibility**

We acknowledge this is highlighted in the Strategy as an issue which impacts youth employment. We note there is existing research demonstrating the impact of transport disadvantage on young people who are trying to access study, training or employment opportunities.⁶ We recommend the Strategy include initiatives and that these reports include proposed solutions which could be included as initiatives or programs to address young people's needs.

- **Housing and homelessness**

TasCOSS strongly believes the Strategy must include consideration of how the Government intends to address housing needs, particularly given the impact of the current housing crisis on Tasmania's young people,⁷ and reports of the disproportionate impact of Covid 19 on young people's housing needs, noting media reports that 'during the COVID pandemic, more than one in 30 young Tasmanians experienced homelessness for the first time in their lives'.⁸

⁶ For example, see Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), 'Tasmanian Youth Forum 2021: Transport' (September 2021), Lisa Stafford, Social Action and Research Centre (SARC), Anglicare, 'Trips Not Made: Addressing Transport disadvantage experienced by disabled people and young people in Tasmania's outer urban and regional communities' (March 2023).

⁷ Annah Fromberg, 'Tasmania's housing crisis is forcing young people like Brayden and Ruby into homelessness', ABC News (17 March 2021) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-17/housing-crisis-forcing-young-tas-people-into-homelessness/100013412>.

⁸ Alexandra Alvaro and Ros Lehman, 'Calls for more secure social housing and higher allowances for Tasmania's homeless youth' ABC News (3 August 2022) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-03/tas-youth-homelessness-rises/101287968>.

- **Financial stress**

TasCOSS' research and consultations with Tasmanians on low incomes across the State confirm the impact of financial stress on those looking for work opportunities or trying to increase their work hours. Tasmanians have told us of their frustration and desperation in trying to seek work whilst struggling to make ends meet, highlighting most of their income then goes on costs such as petrol to get them to and from work, as well as the difficulties in trying to enter or return to the workforce after receiving income support payments. Many also have to pay for police checks, driving lessons and other costs increasingly required by employers. We believe the Strategy must include initiatives addressing financial disadvantage and programs targeted towards supporting young Tasmanians on low incomes or from low income families, to ensure these young people – who are most likely to be excluded from existing employment initiatives – are able to receive the assistance they need to obtain and maintain employment.

- **Disengagement from study or work**

Education, training and employment are strong protective factors linked to positive outcomes for children and young people. However, too many young people disengage from (or are exited from) formal education programs and opportunities due to issues such as challenging behaviours, unmanaged mental health conditions or childhood trauma.⁹ We have previously advocated for comprehensive education reform to support children who are disengaged from, or at risk of disengaging from, school or training.¹⁰ We support the inclusion of initiatives to work proactively with these children and their families/guardians in the Strategy, which should include comprehensive training for all education providers in trauma-informed responses to challenging behaviours, alternative education models, and greater access to social work support for students.

Community services as an industry of choice for young people

TasCOSS strongly supports the development and implementation of initiatives to encourage greater inclusion and participation by young people in community services organisations. Youth employment and training was a priority identified in our Community Services Industry Plan,¹¹ which acknowledged there is 'an opportunity to engage Tasmania's young people in early conversations about working in the community services industry and the opportunities to work alongside other dedicated workers who are making a difference on intergenerational poverty and inequality',¹² and recognised the need to '[r]ecruit young people...experiencing unemployment into entry level community services training'.¹³

The Workforce Coordination Project, which works on the implementation of the Community Services Industry Plan, has recognised the critical role played by young people in our industry, but also the underrepresentation of this cohort in jobs within non-governmental community service organisations. Underlying factors contributing to the lack of young people within the sector include resourcing

⁹ For an exploration of the complex needs of adolescents, see Catherine Robinson, Social Action Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania, 'Too Hard? Highly vulnerable teens in Tasmania' (2017).

¹⁰ TasCOSS, 'Reforming Tasmania's Youth Justice System' (March 2022), 25-27.

¹¹ TasCOSS, 'A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania's Future: Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031' (2021), accessed at https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/228041/Community-Services-Industry-Plan-2021-2031-web.pdf.

¹² Ibid, 26.

¹³ Ibid, 28.

constraints (particularly given the need for young people to receive targeted and intensive mentoring and support), the difficulties of balancing the training and support needed to employ young people with service delivery requirements, and a lack of adequate training opportunities for those who are considering or wanting to enter positions within community services. There is also a need to address underlying factors, such as housing and transport needs, to ensure young people are able to obtain and maintain jobs.

TasCOSS believes many of the strategies identified by the Workforce Coordination Project in relation to the recruitment and retention of young people in community services organisations are also applicable to youth employment more broadly, and recommend their inclusion as initiatives or programs in the Strategy. These include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Coordinated work experience or placements to give young people the opportunity to experience the reality of employment within specific sectors or gain practical skills before making a commitment to further study, and to support community organisations to engage young people in these opportunities without significant impact on existing service delivery;
- The development and implementation of mentoring programs for young trainees (potentially developed across the sector, to give mentees the opportunity to build relationships with other organisations);
- Support for organisations to address the housing and cost of living challenges - identified as key issues impacting existing and potential staff across the sector;
- Initiatives to support students or potential entrants to the community services workforce who are unable to complete unpaid work hours (often needed to gain required qualifications);
- Transport initiatives (particularly in regional or remote areas) to support younger staff, particularly those who may not have a license.

Greater focus on diversity and inclusion for all workplaces

Whilst the Strategy is focused on the development of young Tasmanians to allow them to enter and remain in the workforce, we believe there is a need for broader diversity and inclusion measures – across all industries and workforces in Tasmania – to support young people. All young Tasmanians should be able to enter a workplace, no matter which industry or location, and feel safe, supported, included and welcomed. This doesn't require additional training or support for young people, but for organisations to ensure they are supportive of age diversity and have inclusive policies and culture.

Workplaces that are inclusive and supportive of young employment have an understanding of the experiences and needs of this cohort, as well as their strengths and what young people have to offer in employment. It also requires workplaces, organisations and industries to be open to new ways of working, and to be flexible in relation to how all employees can be accommodated to work most effectively.

TasCOSS recommends the Strategy include initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion in workplaces across Tasmania to ensure they are prepared for work with young people as part of their staff. These initiatives could include comprehensive training and education programs to support diverse and inclusive workplaces, designated places for young people on boards or advisory committees, and workplace policies co-designed with young people.

Supporting young people to exercise their rights

Research demonstrates that young workers are susceptible to experiencing workplace discrimination or issues relating to employment rights, particularly young people who may be already experiencing

disadvantage. A recent report from WEstjustice,¹⁴ in relation to young workers in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne,¹⁵ highlights that young workers face barriers not only when applying for jobs, but whilst employed in a workplace and also when exiting work. The report highlights that many young people are unaware of their workplace rights, and even if they are aware, they are afraid of speaking up or taking action due to fears of losing work or retribution from their employer.

We strongly recommend inclusion of initiatives relating to the rights of young people in the Strategy, including the following recommendations from the WEstjustice report:¹⁶

- Comprehensive community education to give all young people the opportunity to learn about their work rights and responsibilities prior to entering the job market;
- The inclusion of targeted measures in the Strategy, such as a youth jobs guarantee to ensure young people have access to meaningful and secure work;
- The Government should commit to advocating with the Federal Government to abolish junior pay rates, strengthen the work of the Fair Work Ombudsman and promote compliance with the
- Fair Work Act by requiring employers to take positive steps to prevent exploitation; and
- Increase resourcing for community organisations who support young people to understand and exercise their rights (such as community legal centres).

¹⁴ WEstjustice is a Victorian community legal centre providing free legal help, community legal education and advocacy to people in the Western suburbs of Melbourne – for more information access their website: <https://www.westjustice.org.au/>.

¹⁵ Francesca Lai, Program Manager WEstjustice, 'Ignorance is NOT Bliss: The barriers to employment outcomes for young people in Melbourne's West and how to overcome them' (September 2021).

¹⁶ Ibid, 17-20.